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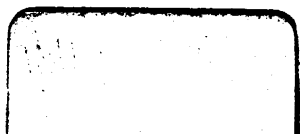
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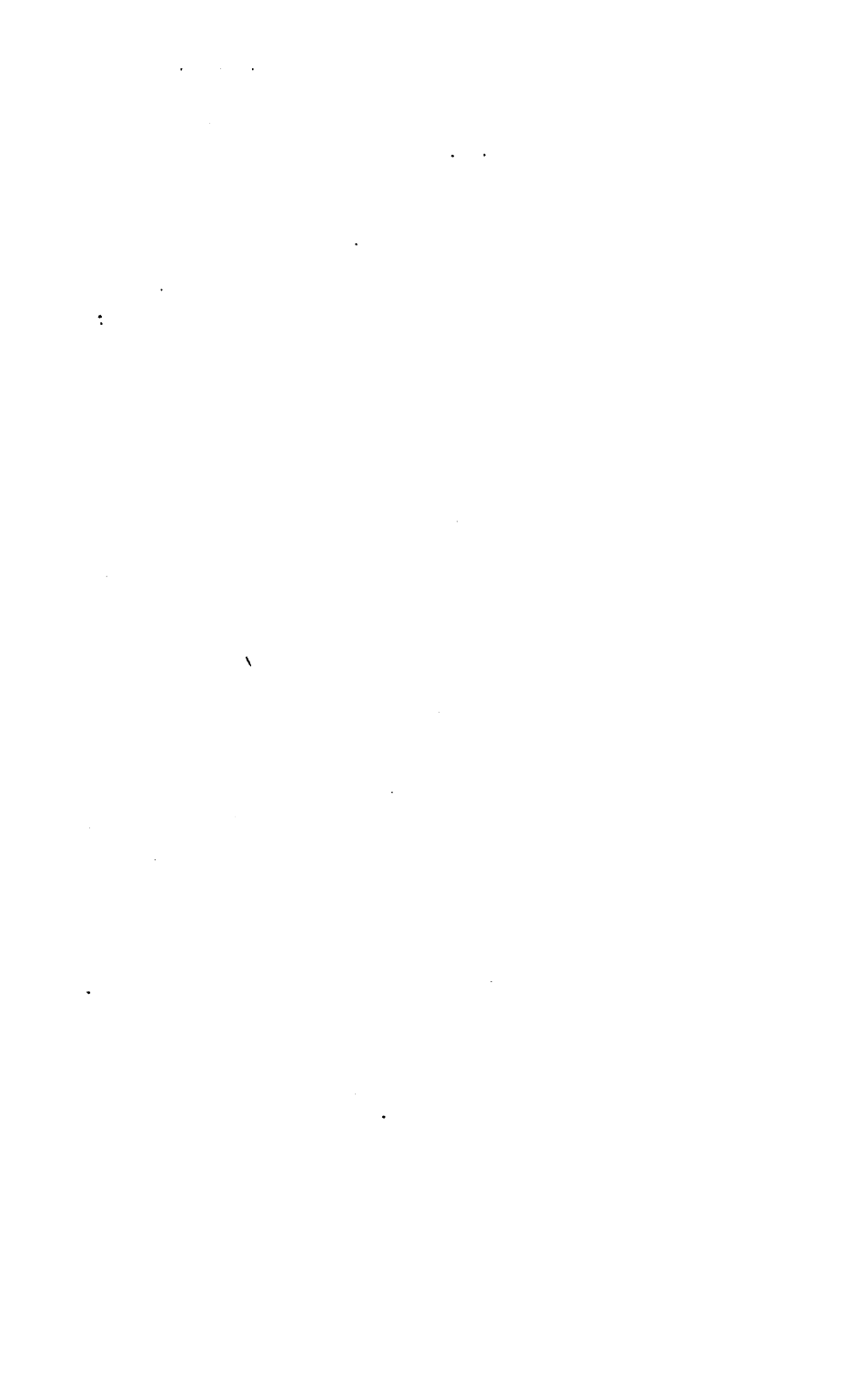
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V A L E R I U S ;

N. C. Bryant.

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They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know what's done i' the Capitol!
SHAKESPEARE

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

NEW-YORK.

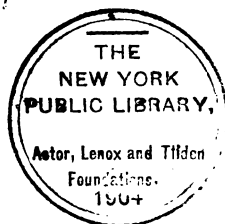
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VALERIUS.

CHAPTER I.

THESE words were spoken as we were moving onward towards this same grove of pines ; and before he had made an end of speaking, we could clearly hear the wind sighing among their branches, and along the dry underground about the roots of their bare trunks. And on coming to them I found that he had said truly there was a tomb in the midst of them ; for a very noble high circular tower was indeed there, which, to judge from the grayness of its walls, and the luxuriance of the ivy that grew thereon, had the appearance of being at least as ancient as any of the surrounding trees. The only method of access to the inside of this tower seemed to be by means of a winding stair, which rose on the exterior from the ground to the summit—a method, by-the-way, not unusual in Roman sepulchres—and it was on one of the steps of the stair that I seated myself, where, between the shaded wall on the one side and the pine branches on the other, I was effectually concealed. As for Dromo, I know not whether it was that he coveted not exactly such close proximity to the stones of such an edifice, or that he preferred, altogether for his own sake, a situation of more conspicuousness ; but instead of ascending along with me, when I mounted

the steps, he took up a position beside one of the largest of the pines that rose out of the ground over-against me. The soil, however, where he stood was somewhat elevated, so that, leaning on his willow staff, he could still, not less than myself, overlook the path with a very commanding superiority.

I ought rather, indeed, to say, that he could have easily overlooked it, had there been light enough there at that time, for the purpose of looking at or overlooking any thing ;—but this was very far from being the case ; for though the moon had got rid of her clouds, and the sky, where any of it could be seen, was abundantly brilliant, the natural darkness of that funereal grove was such, that very little difference could be produced in the midst of it by any variation on the face of any nightly luminary. The gray tower itself alone received some of the moonbeams on one part of its curved surface ; but its contemporary trees participated not in any such illumination,—one solemn shade covering all things beneath the influence of their massy growth ; insomuch that even the white flowing beard of my pretended soothsayer could scarcely be distinguished by me, sitting right over-against the place where he had chosen to take his stand.

“I can scarcely see you, Dromo,” said I ; “but I think that speck must be your beard, and if so, I beg you would tell me what it is you really have in view by all this preparation ? Do you expect me to stay here on a tombstone all night, merely because you wish to have an opportunity of terrifying poor Rubellia by some ghost-like howl or other when she passes you ?—which, by-the-way, it seems by no means certain she will do at all. Or what is your purpose ?”

“Hush, hush, hush !” was his answer ; “ask me no questions, but listen, and hem thrice when you think you hear any footsteps coming—for young ears are the keenest. Hush, I say, for all will be of no use if there be any chatting between us.”

“Well, hush be the word,” said I, somewhat tartly, for I was not quite pleased with all this affectation of mystery. And accordingly silence was kept so strictly,

that, in spite of the chiliness of the stone on which I sat, I presently fell into a sort of a dozing slumber.

By degrees, however,—nor, considering the hour and the fatigue I had undergone, is it wonderful that it should have been so,—my sleep must have become sufficiently profound, for I did not at first, on waking from it, very well remember either where I was or for what purpose I had come thither. And, indeed, I have little doubt my slumbers might have continued till daybreak, but for the interruption I am now to mention.

And yet it seemed as if even in my sleep I had been prepared for this by some strange anticipation ; for although it was a near sound of singing voices that dispelled my slumbers, and made me start from the stone on which I had placed myself, I could not help feeling as if that sound were not altogether new to me ;—whether it were that the half-sensible ear had been already ministering indistinctly to the dreaming spirit, or that some purely fantastic prelude had been vouchsafed to the real music I was destined to hear. I started up suddenly—that much is certain, and listened—with astonishment, yet not altogether with such surprise as might have been expected to attend a transition so hasty from sleep to waking, and from silence to the near neighbourhood of sounds at once so strange and so sweet. With breathless curiosity, nevertheless,—with awe,—and not entirely I think without terror,—did I listen to the extraordinary melody—which, after the pause of a moment, I became satisfied could proceed from no place other than the interior of that old circular sepulchre,—on one of the steps of the staircase leading to the summit of which, I had permitted myself to be overtaken with that deep slumber. Strange, as I have said, and yet passing sweet, were the notes that seemed to ascend out of the habitation of the noble dead into the nightly air,—wild, yet solemn, as if breathed from the bosom of a stately repose and a pensive felicity ; insomuch that almost I persuaded myself I was hearing the forbidden sounds of another world, and the thought came over me,—yet almost I think at that moment without further disturbing me,—what fearful interpretations the old

poets have affixed to such untimely communion, and how the superstition of all antiquity has shrunk from its omen.

My first impulse, after a moment had elapsed, was to call on Dromo, and I did so, at first in a low whisper, and then two or three times more loudly,—but all equally in vain, for no answer was returned to me; and though I strained my eyes in gazing on the place where I had last seen him, yet there I could perceive no trace whatever of any human figure; for the moonlight indeed showed with more distinctness than before the tall stem of the old pine-tree against which he had been leaning; but no motion, nor the least appearance of whiteness, could either my eyes or my imagination discover there. I might easily, you will say, have stepped across the road, and entirely satisfied myself; but I know not well what it was that nailed me to the place where I stood, and prevented me even from once thinking of doing so. The calm sepulchral music, my friends, still continued to stream from the recess of the mausoleum, and painless awe held me there, as if by a charm incontrollable. I gazed upward, and beheld the moon riding above the black pine-tops, in a now serene and cloudless heaven. The wind also had passed away, as it appeared, with the clouds it had agitated. The bird of night was asleep on her unseen bough; and all was silent as death, except only the dwelling of the departed; and a certain indescribable delight was beginning, as I gazed and listened, to be mixed with the perturbation wherewith at first I had been inspired.

And I know not how long I might have stood so, but while I was yet listening to this mysterious music, there was mingled with its expiring cadence the sound of a heavy footstep on the staircase above me, and looking up, I perceived in the moonlight the figure of a man, clad in a white gown, but having a naked sword stretched forth in his hand, immediately over the place whereon I was standing. I obeyed the first natural impulse, and leaped downward swiftly on seeing him; but this availed me nothing, for he also leaped, and almost before my feet had touched the ground, I felt the grasp of his

hand upon my shoulder, and that so strongly that I perceived plainly there was as little possibility of escape as of resistance. I made, therefore, no further effort, but suffered him to do with me as he pleased ; and he, on his part, said not a single word, but, still retaining his hold, pointed with his sword to the same steps from which I had descended, and compelled me to mount them before him, up to the very summit of the round tower.

“ Why is this, sir ?” said I to the man ; “ and whither do you conduct me ?”

“ Peace,” was all his answer ; and, in like manner as he had made me climb the exterior, so also he compelled me to begin the descent of a similar flight of steps, which led down from an aperture above, into the interior of the edifice. And although I must confess to you that I obeyed not this silent guidance without considerable fear, yet I strove as well as I could to control myself. I moved with a step in which I think there could not be perceived any trembling.

Yet you will admit that even had I been master at that moment of less firmness, I might have been excusable ; for, looking down, I perceived that a lamp was burning in the midst of the sepulchral tower far below me, and saw sitting around it a company of at least eight or ten persons, at whose mercy it was quite visible I must be placed. Neither, if I might judge from the demeanour of the person who was bringing me into their assembly, did there appear to be any great room for dependence on them ; for, as to themselves, not one of them looked up towards me as I was stepping down, and being wrapped in their cloaks, I had no means of discovering what manner of persons they were. The way in which I had been treated, however, by one of their number, was a sufficient evidence either that they conceived themselves to have been injured by my being there, or that they were capable of taking some undue advantage of my helpless condition. The calmness of their attitudes, and the recollection of the sounds that I had heard, inclined me to the former of these suppositions ; and when I perceived that not one of them stirred, even till

I had reached the lowermost step of the interior staircase, in this, without question, I already felt myself considerably strengthened.

"Behold," said my guide, as I at length touched the marble floor of the mausoleum itself—"behold proof, and that living, that my suspicions were not quite so groundless as you were pleased to imagine. Here is a man whom I found listening, even on the very steps of this tower. It is for you to decide what shall be done with the eaves-dropper."

With this the whole company sprung at once to their feet, and I perceived evidently, from the surprise expressed in their looks and attitudes, that until that moment not one of them had been aware of my approach. I was about to speak, and declare my innocence of any treachery, or even of any knowledge concerning the purpose of their assembly; but before I could do so, one of them, and I think the oldest of all that were present, having in an instant recovered the tranquillity which my arrival had disturbed, said to me, in a voice of the utmost gentleness, "Young man, what has brought thee hither, or who sent thee? Art thou indeed a spy, and was it thy purpose to betray our assembly?"

"Sir," said I, "I know nothing of your assembly, or of its purpose; I fell asleep by accident on the outside of this tower, and when I awoke, the music that I heard detained me."

"Examine the stripling," quoth he that had conducted me; "examine his person, and let us see whether there be no traces of suspicion about him."

"His looks belie him," replied the senior, "if you have cause for your suspicion. But if you will have it so, search the young man, that the thing may be made apparent how it really is."

And with that my guide, laying his unsheathed sword upon a table or altar of black marble, that was in the midst of the place, proceeded very leisurely to search my garments, and finding in my bosom the scroll which I had received from Thraso, he glanced on it for a moment, and then handing it to the senior, said, with something like a laugh, "Now, sirs, doubt ye if ye will;" and

so saying, the man resumed his sword, and leaned its point on the floor, as he stood by me.

"Before heaven—it is the book of the holy Luke!" said the other; "this is indeed suspicious. How came this scroll into thy hands, young man? Art thou aware that one of the books of the Christians has been found in thy bosom?"

"I know it," said I; "it is one of the books of their faith, and I have read in it this evening for the first time."

"Then thou art not thyself a Christian?"

"I received the book from one Christian," said I, waiving the question; "and I made promise to deliver it into the hands of another."

"Name the Christian who gave thee this book," said my stern guide.

"Thrasso," I replied; "the same who died yesterday in the amphitheatre."

"Yes," quoth he again, "and I suppose it was there he gave it to you. Every one knows the name of Thrasso. Name, if you please, the person to whom you are to deliver the book."

"You shall pardon me," said I, "that I will not. You may call me an eaves-dropper, if you will; but you shall find I am no traitor. It is a Roman—a noble Roman lady to whom I must give this book; and I would not tell you her name although you should slaughter me here in this tomb, which I have entered living and without guilt." And having said this, I folded my arms and stood still, abiding their will.

But scarcely had I finished the words, ere I felt a small trembling hand laid upon my shoulder, and looking round I perceived Athanasia herself, who whispered into my ear, "Valerius, was the book for me? if so, you may say it boldly, and I will vouch for your word."

"For you, lady," I answered in the same tone, "and for none other. You well know that I was present in Thrasso's prison the night before his death; so far at least you can confirm what I have said."

"Sir," said she, then addressing the old man that had before questioned me, "I know this young man; and I

believe what he has said, and will be answerable for his fidelity. It was he that went in to Thraso the other night in his prison, and the book was intrusted to him by the old man that it might be given into my hands. His name is Valerius—Caius Valerius—and he is by birth a noble Roman.”

“Say you so, lady?” interrupted my original conductor; “then I ask his pardon. I have wronged Caius Valerius; but both you and he must forgive me, for it must be confessed he was found in a very extraordinary situation.”

“Even so,” I replied; “I have nothing to complain of. I perceive that I am at present in an assembly of Christians; but he shall do me much wrong who thinks I bear any enmity to them; or, from all that I have yet seen or read, to the faith which they profess. I have read part of that book,” I continued, “for I made promise to Thraso that I should do so before giving it to Athanasia; and I trust I shall still be permitted by her to read more of it before it is finally demanded from me.”

“Oh, read it!” said Athanasia, gently again whispering to me. “Oh yes, read the book, Valerius, and may God enlighten the reader.” And so saying, she herself took up the scroll from the table on which it was lying, and gave it again into my hands.

“There was also a letter for you,” said I, receiving it, “but that I have left at home.”

“No matter,” said Athanasia, “you shall give me the letter and the book both together hereafter.”

“In the mean time,” said I, “I suppose it were better I should retire.”

“Young sir,” said the senior, “that is as you please; we have wellnigh made an end of our worship; but, if it please you, you are at freedom to abide with us till we all go towards the city. Stay, if such be your will; that which you may hear can at least do you no harm. Already, I doubt not, you have seen enough to despise the ignorant calumnies of our enemies.”

And when he had said so, the old man walked to the side of the sepulchre, and took out from behind one of

the urns that stood there (ranged in their niches) a small casket, which, returning, he placed before him on the marble table. Then, opening the casket, he brought forth a silver goblet and a salver containing some little pieces of bread; and, untying from his neck a massive cross* of gold, he set that also on the table, between the cup and the salver. In brief, the Christian priest (for such, as you already see, he was) had finished his preparation, and was about to commence the administration of the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist. And when all the rest were kneeling around the table, Athanasia, laying her hand upon my arm, beckoned to me to kneel by her side in the circle; and so, indeed, I would have done in my ignorance, had not the priest himself pointed to a stool a few yards behind the lady, whereon, accordingly, I seated myself—apart from those who were to be privileged with the participation of those holy symbols.

Now scarcely had they composed themselves in their places, and listened to the first words of the appointed service, when I, sitting there by myself, thought, unless my ears deceived me, there must be a pattering of feet on the outer staircase of the tower; and deeming that it was so, my eyes instinctively, I suppose, were fixed upon the aperture, which, as I have told you, was in the high roof above the circle of the niched walls around me. Here, however, when I first looked up, there was indeed nothing to be seen but the round spot of the sky, far up in the midst of the marble roof; but while I was looking steadfastly thereon, it seemed to me as if that space were suddenly very much diminished; and thinking so, I could not refrain from starting up, and I know not whether some slight ejaculation might not have escaped from my lips. But so it was, that at the very moment of my starting up, there was heard distinctly the howling of dogs from the summit of the mausoleum, and immediately afterward there was a clapping of hands, and a voice, which I well knew could be none other but that of Pona, screamed high above their barking, "I have them—I have them:—here, here—I hold them—let them burst the net if they can."

* See *St. Chrysost. de Adorat. Crucis.* Also, *Conc. Nic. 2, Act. 4.*

And then the dogs howled more and more furiously, and though her screaming voice was still audible, it was no longer to be discovered what words they were which she was uttering.

These, however, which I have already repeated—and you would think the less of that, could I give you any notion of the tone in which they were uttered—were of themselves quite enough to disturb effectually the Christian priest, and the whole of those that were with him. Rising up hastily from their knees, they stood all together around the table, while the old man, having kissed reverently both the cup and the cross, restored them as quickly as he could to the casket from which they had been taken. But while the priest was doing this, he that had found me on the stair, appearing to revert into his suspicion, and looking sternly upon me where I stood, said, “Is this then the innocence which we spared? Is this the noble Roman for whom Athanasia pledged herself? Speak, brethren, what shall be done to this traitor, by whom, even more than by those dogs of the tombs, it is a shame for us that we have been hunted.”

And saying so, the man lifted up his sword again, and it seemed as if he would have smitten me to the ground without further question. But Athanasia, when she saw what he was doing, threw herself swiftly between him and me.

“For shame, Cotilius,” said she; “such suspiciousness is unworthy of a Roman knight.”

“You say well, noble damsel,” quoth the old priest, interrupting her; “but you might say also that such cruelty is unworthy of a soldier of Christ. Peace, peace, children; there is no evil in the youth, nor, if there were, would it be our part to avenge it.”

While he was saying this, three or four blazing torches were thrust down into the place from above, and Athanasia, leaning upon my shoulder, said, “Look up, look up, dear Caius, I see the helmets of soldiers. Alas!” she added, “am I not already here? why, if they will slay me, should they drag me away now from the tomb of my fathers?”

And I felt the trembling of her hands, and she leaned

with all her weight upon my breast ; and I know not, I will confess to you, whether at that moment I tasted more of pleasure or of pain. Of this at least I am sure, that at the price of any danger to myself alone, I would gladly have purchased that word of kindness, and that pressure of confidence.

But by this time several of the soldiers had already begun to descend the steps into the tower, and before another minute had elapsed, we found ourselves surrounded by the flame of their torches. And he that seemed to lead the party, after counting us one by one, said, turning to his companions, " Well, an old woman has told the truth for once ; here are even more I think than she warned us of. Come along, worthy people, come along ; you must not keep the tribune waiting for you all night, and our watch is wellnigh expired already. Come, come, mount the stair ; you know your own qualities, or, if you don't, this is no time for standing upon precedence. Come along ; it will take a good half-hour yet, I believe, to lodge you all safely in the Tullian ; and do you," he added, laying his hand on the hilt of Cotilius's sword, " do you, my good sir, allow me to save you the trouble of carrying this bauble."

Nor was the stern knight so foolish as to dispute the command ; but having yielded up his sword, he forthwith began to ascend the stair, one or two of the spearmen preceding him with their torches. The old priest followed, and so did all the rest ; the last that went up being, I think, Athanasia and myself.

CHAPTER II.

ON every side around the old tower, when I looked from the summit of it, I perceived foot-soldiers drawn up in a double line, while the road along which I had come with Dromo, was occupied by a band of horsemen, one of whom moved forward when he saw us descend.

ing, as if to take cognizance of the number and quality of the surprised assembly. His long cloak being muffled about his ears as he sat on horseback, and the shadow of his helmet falling deeply on the upper part of his countenance, I did not at first suspect who it was ; but he had not counted half the party to the superior officer behind him, ere I recognised him from the sound of his voice alone ; and who, think ye, should it be but my good friend Sabinus !

I do not think I ever yet saw surprise expressed so strongly as it was on the face of the jolly centurion, when his eye detected me. He checked his horse so sharply, that the animal bounded into the air as if he had been transfixed with an arrow ; and " Valerius !" quoth he, " ha ! by the life of Trajan, what is the meaning of this ? Valerius in a Christian synagogue ! By all the gods, there must be some mistake in this matter." But before I, in my confusion, could make an answer to these exclamations, his eye chanced to glance on Athanasia, who, pale and trembling, still retained the support of my arm ; whereupon there was an end at once, as it seemed, of his extreme astonishment ; for, " Ha ! ha !" said he, in a quite different tone of voice, " there is a lady in the case, is there ?" And then stooping in his seat he whispered, half-laughing, into my ear, " My most hypocritical smooth-face, you shall see what is the consequence of bringing these transatlantic pranks of yours to Rome. By Herculēs, you wild dog, it may cost you some little trouble to get out of this scrape."

And when he said so, he at once turned his horse, and rejoining the troop, appeared to enter into close conversation with him who sat at the head of the line ; and I could see well enough from the gestures he used, and from the manner in which the other listened to him, that he was making some explanation which appeared by no means satisfactory to the person who heard it. Sabinus raised his voice very much as the colloquy proceeded, but I could catch nothing more than the sound of one or two most violent oaths, while, all the time, the tribune (for such he was) continued to shake his head in a way significant at once of doubt and determination. The

end of it was, that he pointed with his sword ; and Sabinus, having apparently received a command he durst not dispute, forced his horse backward, at one plunge, into the place from which he had originally rode forth. And, whether the animal had been infected with something of the rider's passion, I know not ; but it seemed as if, after he had compelled him into his station, it was no very easy matter to keep him there, for he pawed and pranced so violently that I thought he would have thrown all his neighbours into disorder. The strong hand and knees of the centurion, however, prevented this, and the chafing Thracian was ruled into calmness.

But in truth I had no leisure for observing any thing further, for some other soldiers coming up, with led horses and mules in their hands, our party were immediately separated one from another, each, as it seemed, being destined to proceed to some peculiar place of safety, under peculiar guidance. I saw the old feeble priest lifted on a mule by one of the soldiers, and then hurried away towards the city, with a horseman on each hand of him. The fiery Cotilius, and one or two more, were compelled to follow, with similar attendance, in the same direction ; others, again, had their horses' heads turned more to the westward, but all departed at great speed, and were soon lost to my view among the projections of the tombs. The last that remained to be disposed of were Athanasia and myself, and for a moment I had some hope that we might perhaps be sent to the same place ; but this hope was in vain, and after I perceived that it was so, scarcely even was time permitted to me for bidding her farewell. To kiss her hand, and to whisper a single word of parting hope into her ear, was all I could do. A tear rolled from her cheek and fell upon my hand ; yet she smiled faintly upon me, and, "Hope," said she—"yes, dear Valerius, Hope and Faith both go with me." And with that the pale maiden was separated from the arm to which she had trusted, and I saw her also mounted and borne away rapidly from before my eyes, in the midst of a cloud of the horsemen. While I was yet straining my eyes to gaze

after her, I found myself in like manner seized around the waist by a strong man, and lifted upon a horse, whose bridle one of those that were to guard me held in his hand ; and almost before I could look around me, we had escaped from the flare of the torches, and the crowd of the soldiery, and were stretching at a rapid pace, I knew not whither, although I suspected, from the wideness of the road, that we had already regained the Appian, and were proceeding in its course.

But I have forgotten to mention to you, that just at the moment when they were lifting Athanasia upon the mule that was to bear her from my sight, my eye caught a glimpse of the witch Pona, who was sitting at the root of one of the pine-trees, close to the tower. The two dogs whose barking we had heard before the soldiers broke in upon us were couched beside her as she sat ; and behind her stood, leaning against the tree, a figure wrapped in a rich red cloak, which I suspected to be a female also, but could not be certain, because the countenance was quite concealed in the folds of the garment. To this person, whoever it might be, the witch turned round eagerly, while the soldiers were carrying off Athanasia ; and I heard again, at the same moment, that low croaking laugh, the remembrance of which has power, even at this distance of time, to make me shudder when I think of it. I saw—I heard no more,—for, as I have told you, immediately afterward I also was carried away. In the midst of all the confusion, however, both of my own mind and of the scene around me, that hideous laugh of the old enchantress could not be heard without making an impression upon me ; and I think its note rung in my ear during half of the tempestuous ride which ensued.

I say tempestuous, for our hasty pace had not borne us to any great distance from the place where all these things occurred, ere the sky, which, as ye have heard, had all that night been sufficiently variable, began to exhibit appearances which they that rode by my side interpreted as significant of the approach of one of those nocturnal storms, to which, at that season of the year, the fair heaven of Italy is peculiarly subject. That they

apprehended somewhat of this sort I perceived from their looks, as they stopped for a moment to draw the hoods of their mantles over their brazen helmets ; for as to words, of these they uttered none, either to me or to each other, until our journey drew near to its close. For me, however, the numberless agitations through which I had passed in the course of the few preceding hours had, I suppose, communicated an unnatural measure of ardour to my boyish blood ; for neither did I feel the night-breeze chill me as we rushed through it, nor partook in any sort of the desire my companions testified to cover themselves from the rain, which seemed to be about to discharge itself out of all those black and lowering clouds now gathered above our heads from every region of the heavens. When, on the contrary, the first heavy drops fell on my face and hands, it seemed to me as if they were but the foretaste of a cooling delight, and I bared my burning forehead to the grateful moisture, with the eagerness of one who, in a parched and dry place, comes suddenly upon the green margin of a well-spring. Nor did this sensation subside even after the storm had thickened to the utmost, and the dusty roads had drunk abundantly of the plashing rain. The delight grew upon me as I proceeded. The strong wind blew with redoubled coolness upon my moistened neck—the rain-drops dashed big and heavy on my hot hands ; and I perceived that, as is the nature of those animals, the thunder which was mustering in the air filled my horse one moment with dread, and the next with a blind fierceness. At last the great voice of the thunder shouted overhead, and its echoes spread wide and far on either side, until they seemed to be absorbed to the left in the remote gulfs of the Apennine, and on the right-hand in the measureless bosom of the western sea—of which, as we galloped along the hill-side, the broad lightning (unless my fancy deceived me) revealed ever and anon a distant and melancholy glimpse.

We had passed a hill covered with towns, villages, and stately mansions (which I afterward learned was no other than the famous Alban), ere the storm subsided beneath the influence of the reddening dawn. Yet

even then we slackened not our pace, although the horses were by this time not a little exhausted with the swiftness of their motion, and the weight of their wet riders. On rode we in the growing light of the morning; but I perceived ere long that we had left the wide and magnificent Appian Way, and were pursuing the line of a narrow road, which seemed to carry us more and more westward.

At length we halted for a moment on the brow of a declivity, where three paths separated; and I perceived that among my guides there was some little uncertainty as to which of these it behooved them to follow. While they were muttering together, I looked and beheld at length the wide sea heaving far below, over what appeared to me to be a forest as mighty as I had ever seen in my native island.

Old hoary oaks leaned on either hand quite over the narrow pathway into which (after their brief pause of consultation) my conductors directed our course. Here and there, such a shield had those huge leafy boughs extended over the road, that the dust rose from among the feet of our horses as if all that night not one drop of rain had fallen there; although elsewhere, in the absence of such mighty trees, the water lying across the path in pools testified abundantly that the tempest had not spared the forest any more than the champaign. Vast waving gulfs of bay and ilex, with here and there some solitary pine raising itself proudly in the midst, seemed to stretch away on either hand between the groves of those gigantic oaks.

The path we followed carried us ever deeper and deeper into the bosom of the woods; and, at length, so buried were we in the windings of their stifling shade, that I had lost all notion of the direction in which I was moving; until, after two or three hot hours, weary man and jaded horse were, I believe, equally delighted with snuffing once more the open current of the air. We reached not the edge of the forest, however, before I could hear distinctly the dashing of the Mediterranean waves; and the last ascent we climbed laid open to my view a long sweep of the rolling waters, and their rocky

coast garnished everywhere with the richness of superincumbent woods. Far, very far, in the distant north, I thought I could recognise some of the stately towers of Ostium, bosomed apparently within the billows over which they presided. All between was one wide waste of wood and rock, save here and there a watch-tower perched on the margin, and whitened half-way up with the foam of the yet uncalmed sea.

Then, nor ever, could I look upon the waters of the great deep, without something of that filial yearning which seems so natural to every native of our sea-girt island. But neither could I contrast the condition in which I now approached it with the strong and light hopes under which I had so lately left it behind me, without many thoughts more sad and serious than as yet had frequently visited my bosom. What a strange brood of visions had passed before my eyes since, but a few days before, I stepped for the first time, light of heart, beneath the shadow of those far-off bulwarks! What new emotions had arisen within my breast in the interval! How had every sense been gratified! how had every dream of imagination been exceeded! Yet what a void had been created within—what a void felt—not, alas, filled! Alas! said I to myself at one moment, why is it that I have been subjected to all these novelties? Had I not done better to have remained, after all, where life flowed ever calmly—where affection hung over me like a protecting buckler, and my soul could sleep in the security of unbroken faith? But this was only for a moment. The thoughts of Athanasia haunted me more deeply and more firmly—I thought over every word she had spoken—every look of hers rose up in succession to my memory, with all the vividness of a beautiful and a troubled dream. I seemed to feel as if she were yet present beside me, the trembling of her pale fingers upon my shoulder—I kissed the hand on which her parting tear had fallen, as if it were yet wet with the dear moisture. When I thought of the perils in which she must now be enveloped—of the pains she must have suffered—must at that moment be suffering,—it was as if I could have burst bands of iron.

like flax, from off my hands. When a glimpse of the darker future opened before, I shuddered, and, urging my poor horse onward in the recklessness of total abstraction, I perceived that even my guides pitied the visible agony wherein all my boiling spirit was involved.

We stopped before the gate of one of the watch-towers, which, as I have told you, I had seen scattered along the edge of the sea. But this, when we came up to it, appeared to me a great deal larger than I had expected to find any of them. The narrow way along which we had been riding, brought us close to its gate, on the side towards the land; but the rock shelving rapidly on the other side gave it the semblance, at a little distance, of being suspended over the waves.

It was a building of rude and apparently very antique structure, the under part, where the door was, square—but the upper circular; as is, for the most part, the old Roman fashion in such erections. And this, indeed, I doubt not, might have stood there long enough to have shown a beacon, when some fleet of Syracuse or Carthage darkened the blue sea over-against the Lestrigonian bay, renowned in old song, or the snow-white promontory of Gaieta. Now, however, it was easy to see it had been devoted to purposes of a very different order.

One of the soldiers dismounted forthwith, and began to knock rather violently at the door; but some little time elapsed ere any sound from within responded to the clamour he raised. At last, however, the hard and withered face of the keeper of the tower made its appearance at a little opening a short space above the door, and then the helmets of my companions passed, I suppose, for a sufficient warrant, for in a twinkling we heard the bolts creaking, and the old postern was soon set ajar for our in-going. It would be more proper to say, in the first instance, for the out-coming of the keeper above mentioned; for, I assure you, that person would have thought it a very strange thing for any one to be admitted into the entrance of his old tower, before

he had scrutinized him on the outside of it, with his own authoritative and piercing eyes.

And great indeed as were the troubles of my mind at that moment, I swear to you I could scarcely forbear from laughing outright, when this venerable personage did present himself at the threshold of his garrison. Imagine to yourself a tall, thin, skinny man of three-score years, with a face as dry and yellow as ye have seen on the outside of a pie, and hair as white as ever the skill of a confectioner could represent, and legs bearing, it may be, the same sort of proportion to the feet below them which the shaft of Saturn's scythe usually does to its blade. Clothe the nether part of this absurd figure in a pair of Dacian or Gaulish breeches, throw a very decent-looking but somewhat threadbare toga over his shoulders, and, to finish the outfit, deck his head with a military casque of the true Macedonian cut, that is to say, sitting close and compact above the ears, and topped with a bristling plume of horse-hair, the ends of which fell down on his shoulders, as thickly as if they alone had been intended to turn the edge of a sword in the assault.

He stood with an air of great dignity beneath his lintel, and listened with the most profound gravity to the message which one of the Prætorians whispered into his ear. On this conclusion, he shrugged his shoulders, and regarding me (who by this time had also dismounted) with a glance, made up, I think, in pretty equal proportions, of surprise, contempt, and curiosity, signified by the motion of his hand that we might all three enter. He whistled at the same moment, and there came forth a very young and comely damsel, who, with many blushes and smiles, took possession of the reins of our horses.

"Stand there," quoth he, "stand there, little Cestia, and see if there be never a handful of corn to be got for the prince's cattle,—stand there, and we shall be with you again anon." And then he also whispered something into the maiden's ear, and I saw her looking at me from under her eyelids with an expression of very uncommon curiosity. Two or three curly-pated

urchins, of different sizes, joined her at the same moment, and to them, in her turn, the maiden whispered; whereupon the eldest of the children, retreating behind her, eyed me earnestly along the skirt of her tunic, while the younger ones continued to gaze where they were, with looks of open stupidity and wonder. Of all this I could make nothing at the moment, but when we had got fairly into the inside of the tower, I heard the children whispering distinctly enough to each other, "A Christian! a Christian! a Jew! a Jew!" and then I was at no loss to comprehend the secret cause of all the astonishment I had observed.

The lower part of the tower, into which I had now been conducted, seemed to form nothing more than one huge, bare, and quadrangular apartment, serving, I supposed (and rightly), at once as hall and vestibule to the upper chambers contained within the walls. A small flight of steps, in one of the corners, seemed to afford the only means of access to what was above; but from the position of a door immediately below these, I suspected a part of the prison must be placed under ground. Close beside this door there stood, upon a very rude pedestal, a still more rude bust, either of Jupiter, of Apollo, or of Hercules. The workmanship was such, that I could not be very certain which of the family it was whose features this was intended to represent, nor whether the principal appendage was meant to be a club, a lyre, a bow, or a thunder-bolt; but it did not escape my observation that the old keeper crept as close as he could to the sacred stone, as soon as I stepped over the threshold. The guards who had come with me did not, however, permit him to remain very long under the shadow of that protecting tutelary; for, saying that it behooved them to return as soon as possible to Rome, they insisted on his extending to them some portion of the same kindness with which, as I have said, he had already desired their horses to be treated by the young woman.

"Come," said one of them, "old comrade, although you have taken to the gown yourself, you must not quite forget the old Sagum. I'll be bound such a snug

situation as this was not given to one that had never distinguished himself. May I ask, if you have enjoyed it long? or is it only since the present Cesar's accession that you have been so fortunate?"

"Forget the old Sagum!" quoth the senior. "By the eye of Mars, I believe I had worn out a score of them before any one that now hears me was born. I promise you, I shall never forget the Sagum. Here, boy—here, Anthony—little Anthony—bring out the cheese, and ask your mother for the key, for these gentlemen must drink before they depart."

One of the little boys that had come out to the door on our arrival re-entered speedily, hearing this command, and busied himself in setting forth a wooden board, whereon he placed in great order a huge piece of yellow cheese, and a heap of crisp white cakes of rye. A large jug of water also garnished the mess; but there seemed to be a little less of diligence, or more of difficulty, about the wine.

"Fall-to, comrades—fall-to," says he of the tower; "plain fare is ours, but ye have a hearty welcome for your own sakes, and, under favour, for the sake also of my dear old commander, whose likeness graces the pum-mels of your swords. Fall-to briskly; but where is the wine, Anthony? Don't you see we are waiting? Am I not master in this fastness?"

"But my mother has the key," quoth the boy.

"Even so, little spark," replies the senior; "therefore fetch it from her quickly, and tell her, Anthony," added he in a lower note—"be sure you tell her, there are two gentlemen of the Prætorians here, with a young Christian, who is to be our prisoner."

With that the little boy began to ascend the stairs within the tower, but still in a very leisurely manner. He knocked at a door apparently half-way up, and I heard him deliver the whole of his message; for he spoke it perhaps rather more loudly than had been intended. But she to whom it was addressed seemed to hear it with any thing but that benignity with which poets have ever decorated the transmission of the gifts of Bacchus.

"What, jackanapes!" quoth she, in a voice loud, boisterous, and all but masculine—"must he send you to tell his lies for him?—Prætorians and Christians, quotha! Here is a pretty lie got up, sirrah. But hark ye, youngster, tell this father of yours, who will be the ruin of us all, that though Trajan himself were in the tower, *he* should not have one drop till mid-day, and then not a hairbreadth above the thread that I have tied round the blue goblet. Prætorians indeed! ha! ha! ha! Get you down-stairs, little Anthony, and learn to lie more cunningly the next time."

"Mother, there are certainly two soldiers below. Cestia is holding their horses at the gate; and they have brought a young man with them, who, they say, was caught eating a little child in a tomb last night, and I suppose he must be a Christian."

Some more words passed between them, but the old man made such a clattering on his trencher, and talked at the same time so loudly to the soldiers, that I could not understand the rest of what was said. However, little Anthony had certainly been gifted with some powers of persuasion, for many minutes did not elapse (although it is true the yellow cheese had time enough to receive many mortal gashes) ere down of a surety came in proper person the lady of the tower. The sound of her descending step was so heavy on the stair, that before she appeared I was prepared for the entrance of a very portly female; but her bulk, notwithstanding, astonished me when I did see her. In spite of her enormous dimensions, however, she had evidently been at some period, no doubt a pretty distant one, something of a comely person. Features, in themselves small and handsome, were seen to no great advantage, cased in an immense supererogatory circumference of cheeks and chin; and an absurdly tidy foot glanced from under ankles most disproportionably massive. A string of amber beads floated to and fro on the ocean of her bosom. She had fine golden bracelets on her arms too, but they were only half seen, being almost buried in fat; and, to crown the whole, she wore a flaxen wig, which did not entirely conceal the original dark bristles

below. At the girdle of the amazon hung, on the right side, the much desiderated bunch of keys, being balanced on the left by a dagger and toothpick-case, almost of equal dimensions.

Her face seemed to be flushed with the promise of a storm when she came in, but the sight of the two horsemen, I suppose, quieted all her suspicions, for she satisfied herself with saying to her husband, "You stupid old fool, why did you not come up and let me know the gentlemen were here sooner? and then to send children with your messages, whom nobody can trust to!" A glance of high scorn accompanied these agreeable words; and then, her face assuming an expression of the utmost cordiality, she went up and shook hands with each of the soldiers where they sat; and, "Welcome," said she, "comrades, a hearty welcome to the sight of your helmets. By Jove, I thought we should never have any thing more to do in the old tower!—May I be poisoned, if I have heard the jingle of a cuirass in the hall since the first week of Nerva. Here, boy, take the keys, and bring out the biggest bottle you can see; for the gentlemen shall see what it is to be in the dwelling of an old campaigner—Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" re-echoed the husband, receiving and opening the bottle; "you must know we are both of us old campaigners. You must know my wife is a Spaniard, and has been over half the world with me in her day."

"I honour a lady who has followed the camp," quoth one of the soldiers, holding up a large cupful of the wine; "and may this draught choke me, if I honour her the less either because she is a fine woman or because she is the countrywoman of Cesar."

"That indeed she is," replied the old man: "she was born in the same town; and I think they are children of the same—"

"Hold your tongue, fool," interrupted the lady; "I should like to know why you are able to tell my history better than myself. Here's to you all, gentlemen; and here's to Trajan the glorious Roman prince, who is an honour to Rome and to Spain, and to all the world.

By Jove," she continued, slapping the table with her hand, "I remember him when he stood no higher than this board, for I was born and bred up in sweet Italica, and I have him before me, as it were but of yesterday riding on a little white pony that he had, and that upon the banks of the prettiest stream that ever my eyes shall see. Come, fill your cups, gentlemen of the Guard Cesarian; there shall never a man under my roof drink out of a half-filled goblet to the great Cesar!"

"Will *you* drink to Cesar, young man?" quoth one of the soldiers, turning to me; "will you drink honestly to the emperor, in case you also have a full cup given you? and, by-the-by, I think you must have almost as much need of it as any of the rest."

I nodded assent to the proposition, and the matron, for the first time, deigning to cast her eyes on me, said, "Come, Master Christian, they say you were caught eating a raw child, but may I be so dieted myself if I believe it; for I've seen a good deal both of peace and of war in my day, and I never yet knew anybody that preferred such fare when he had choice of any other. Come along, draw a stool for yourself, and try whether a piece of rye-cake and cheese won't serve you this morn-ing." And while I was complying with this courteous invitation, I heard her whisper to one of my guards,— "By Jove, 'tis a proper lad, after all; is this true that they have told me of him?" The soldier shook his head in return, and looked very sagacious, but I don't think he said any thing. "Ay, ay," quoth she; "prudence in a Prætorian! this is something new, however. By heavens" (sinking once more into her whisper), "by heavens, I believe the young man has a red edge to his gown. What is his name? who is he?"

The soldier shook his head again, and I heard him whisper,— "By the life of Cesar, you know as much about him as any of us. There was a whole cluster taken last night a little way beyond the Capene Gate, and he was one of them; but what they were about, or who he is, I know not, only he is certainly somebody, for I saw our centurion salute him."

"I saw him with Sabinus," whispered the other soldier, leaning across the board,— "I saw him, I am

quite sure of it, along with the centurion and a gallant company the last day the amphitheatre was open; they sat together all the day, and appeared quite familiar."

"I pray you, sir," quoth the lady, raising her voice, "I pray you fill your cup, and here I pledge you to our better acquaintance. You shake your head—well. But what must be, must; and while you are with us, we may at least be good friends."

"Thanks," said I, complying with her command, and indeed I was sorely athirst; "here, then, is health to all present; and fair health to the great Trajan, says no one here more heartily than I, Spaniard or Roman."

So saying, I drank off the wine, and setting down the goblet, I believe I said, "Excellent, by Jove," or something of that sort; for they all started when they heard what I said, and the old woman called out lustily, "Fill him another cup to the brim, whether he be Christian or not. The young man at least swears by the gods, and drinks to the prince. May worse never cross our threshold, say I."

"The old man," said one of the soldiers, turning to the hostess, "the old man that was killed the other day in the amphitheatre for his superstition might have saved his head, even at the last moment, if he would have done as much."

"Well, well," quoth she again; "let every one mind his own matters, and I shall mind mine. Have you brought any money with you, young man?"

"Not much," said I, for to me the question was addressed, "not very much, I think;" at the same time taking out a purse, which, from good luck more than foresight, was, after all, very tolerably supplied.

"No matter," quoth the amazon; "no matter whether you have much or little with you. If you have not much, you shall send to my good friend the centurion Sabinus, and he will give you more. You shall have the best room in the tower, however; and (bating child's flesh), whether you be Christian or not, by the pillars of Hercules, you shall have the best we can give you. Husband, bring down our book, and let the gentleman enter his name with his own hand. It has been useless

for a long time, I trow, but you'll find it in the old place below your bedstead. Come, stir, old eyebrow; must you have me do every thing, and disgrace you before our good comrades?"

The ancient did bestir himself, whether merely for the pleasure of obeying his spouse, or from curiosity to discover my name, or from mixed motives, I shall not take upon me to determine. Having drained his cup, however, to the foundation, he certainly rose from table, and limping up the staircase, ere long returned with a musty scroll of parchment, which, having unfolded and blown away the dust from it, he forthwith presented to me. I glanced over the record and found in it the names of various persons, all apparently entered in their own handwriting; and most of them, as the woman had already given room to suspect, bearing date in the troublous reign of Domitian. The last name was that of Marcus Protius Lamontanus, who, as it seemed, had been set free from his confinement immediately on the accession of Nerva; so I took it for granted he had been one of the victims of Domitian's insane oppression, and immediately under his I wrote my own name with that of my father.

The woman seized the parchment before the writing was dry, and handing it to one of the soldiers, said, "Read aloud, if it please you—let us hear how the gentleman is called." But the soldier, being apparently no great clerk, shuffled the scroll into the hand of his companion, who, equally puzzled I suppose, handed it back to the lady of the tower. It was then, at last, that she condescended to call her husband into council; and he, assuming without question an air of no inconsiderable importance, pronounced forthwith, very distinctly, the name as it was written. But when he came to the name of my father, the old man, dropping the scroll, turned to me with a face of infinite surprise, and said, "So preserve me the power of Jove! I believe you must be the son of the same Valerius who was centurion in the ninth legion during the wars of the great Agricola."

"You have guessed rightly; I am the same."

"Then the more is the pity," he replied, in a grave

voice, and rising from his seat; "the more is the pity that you should have entered, in such case as this, the dwelling of one that was a true soldier beneath the eagle of your father; the more, I say, is the pity, young gentleman. But forgive me if in any thing we have been disrespectful."

"There is no occasion," said I, "for any such apology. I am here as a prisoner, and have been treated with all courtesy beyond what a prisoner could expect."

"By Jove!" interrupted the spouse, "I thought I had some knowledge of the young gentleman's pretty face from the beginning. Well, for all that has come and gone, I hope ten years hence he will be as fine a man as his father was the day he slew the Caledonian giant, and tumbled him from his chariot in front of all the line—yes, in sight of Galgacus himself. It was the same day," said she, turning to her lord, "that you were taken prisoner, and driven away into the woods."

"As witness these marks," quoth the man; and with that he instantly stripped open his tunic, and displayed part of his breast stamped with various figures of blue and yellow, after the Caledonian fashion, and bearing withal the traces of one or two very formidable wounds. The Prætorians regarded the exhibition with great indifference; but you will believe I could not see without interest scars that had been received beneath the banners of my father.

There was an obvious restraint, after all this, in the behaviour of the whole of the party; for although the huge bottle was wellnigh exhausted, they had not got enough to make them feel quite at ease in the presence of one whose rank they had discovered to be such as mine. The woman, on her part, redoubled her kindness; but seeing that I interrupted their merriment, I soon requested her to show me the place where I was to be confined. And, indeed, as you may imagine, I had by this time not a little need of repose.

Both she and her husband accordingly arose to usher me to my prison. I gave money to the soldiers, and requested them to inform Sabinus of the place to which I had been conveyed; but did not choose to write any

thing, either to him or to Licinius, until I should have had a little time for reflection.

I then followed the ancient pair to the upper part of the tower, where I was lodged in a small chamber, the open window of which afforded a wide prospect of the sea, but with difficulty permitted my eye to take in even a little strip of the rocky margin. A single low couch was almost the whole of its furniture.

Here, having summoned a tall young clown to keep guard behind the door, they left me to my reflection; but such had been my fatigue, that, in spite of all the anxieties which surrounded me, I ere long fell fast asleep. The blessed playfulness of nature carried me far from Rome and Italy, back to the green woods of the island where my father had achieved deeds of glory, and my mother had tended my infancy beneath the shadow of her own trees. Of all that I had seen since I left home, Athanasia only glided before me in my slumber; and she (such was the sweet mockery) appeared smiling, happy, and serene.

Ere I awoke, the calm sea was already purple below me, and the broad sun about to plunge beneath the waters.

CHAPTER III.

BUT neither purple sea, nor golden sky, nor all the divine tranquillity of the evening air, could sooth my mind into repose, after I had once awakened to a sense of the situation into which I had been brought—I should say rather of the situation in which Athanasia was placed; for, in truth, compared with her probable suffering, all I could suffer in my own person appeared to me as nothing;—I was a man. For myself, I could not in seriousness fear any calamity worthy of the name; if such should come, it must be my business to wrestle with it as I might. But to think of her, young, beauti-

ful, innocent, and of all to which she might be exposed amid the rude hands in which I had left her,—even this of itself, without plunging deeper into the distant future, was more than sufficient to press upon all my spirits with a subduing and irresistible weight.

Yet the admirable regulation of all the details of public procedure, under the then emperor's administration, on the one hand, and the strong necessary influence of Athanasia's noble family, on the other; these considerations, it is true, recurred from time to time to my harassed recollection, and broke, or at least relaxed, for the instant, the bonds of my anxiety.

The sound of my footsteps, as I paced in my perplexity from one end of the apartment to the other, had, I take it for granted, reached the ears of the people below; for many minutes had not elapsed ere the wife of the old soldier entered, bearing in her hand a goblet of wine, and a supply of fruit and cakes, which would have been more than sufficient for the supper of one as easy and as happy as I was otherwise. To her first salutation, which was equally cheerful and courteous, I could with difficulty bring myself to make any reply, but she exerted herself so much in arranging every thing for my convenience, that I could not be insensible to the kindness of her meaning, nor suffer her to depart without acknowledging it. But I heard her whisper, after she had left me, to one of her children who had been waiting behind the door—"Poor young man, he is in a sad state; you see what it is, child, to have an evil conscience. He has denied the gods, and no wonder that they permit evil thoughts to torment him. You remember what the priest told us about those terrible Furies, whom Jupiter lets loose upon mortals, when he is thoroughly provoked with their perversity."

"Mother," replied the child, "you told papa he was a bad man for drinking so much wine every day. I hope Jupiter will not let loose the Furies upon poor papa."

"Hush!" quoth she, "do not speak of such a thing. I hope papa will listen to *me*, and that the reason I speak will be enough. But this is quite another thing, Anthony; for this poor young gentleman is a Christian, and

they say believes neither in Jupiter, nor in Mars, nor in sacrifices, nor in auguries : for my part, I tremble when I think of it. But his father was a great and a pious man, and all his kindred are noble ; and let us hope he may repent and be prevailed upon to acknowledge the deities, for otherwise the Furies will torment him alive, and who knows what fearful things may be his portion when he is dead ! And as for that, they say the emperor is determined not to permit one of them to live ; for there is no saying how far their wickedness might extend itself—evil is always infectious.”

I heard no more of her conversation with the child, but it was not long ere my attention was attracted by one carried on at a greater distance below me, in which you will not be surprised that I should have felt myself much more interested, even although the distance was such that I could not distinguish one word that was said. I knew from the first moment that it was impossible I should be mistaken—I was perfectly certain it was Sabinus himself who was now talking with the old woman ; and I at once suspected the worthy centurion, having learned from the soldiers who carried me off to what place they had conveyed me, had undertaken this speedy journey for the purpose of comforting me in my confinement. The kindness with which he had treated me from the beginning of our acquaintance had been such, that I could have no occasion to wonder at his exerting himself to discover me ; but I confess this alacrity was more than I had been prepared for, and I waited only for the moment when he should enter my apartment to throw myself upon his bosom, and intrust all my troubles to him, as to a friend and a brother.

There was something, however, which I could not at all comprehend in the merriment which seemed to be reigning below on his arrival. Loud peals of laughter from the jailer's wife interrupted the uniform hearty tone of the centurion's voice ; and the feeble treble of the old soldier himself was stretched ever and anon to the utmost, in a sort of ineffectual attempt at a chuckle. What could be the occasion of so much merriment, at such a moment, I could by no means understand. But the

steps of the party were soon distinguishable upon the stair, and I heard enough during the latter part of their ascent, to enlighten me as to the source of the mirth, if not satisfy me of its propriety.

At last in they came, and the centurion, embracing me affectionately, thrust into my hand, without preface, a piece of parchment, which I perceived to be nothing less than an order for my immediate dismissal from confinement, signed by one of the Roman magistrates. Then taking off his riding-cap, and rubbing with his handkerchief his most audacious and soldier-looking brows, "My dear boy," quoth he, "I see you are going to thank me, but don't wound my modesty by any fine speeches. There was war before Helen; have a better care another time, and don't pay Rome such a poor compliment as to say that you can find nobody to flirt with but a Christian damsel, and no place for flirtation but a gloomy old tomb, lined from top to toe with urns and lachrymatories. My honest friend here was quite frightened with the idea of having such an unbelieving reprobate as they said you were, under the same roof with her children. But now her fears are dispelled, for good souls are always tolerant to the little vagaries of young blood; so thank your hostess, my lad, kiss her hand, take one cup to the health of the old tower, and tighten your girdle; for you must know you have a little bit of a ride before you ere bedtime."

"Ha, ha, ha!" quoth the woman; "my Master Sabinus had always such a merry way with him! Well, who should have thought, when the soldiers brought him in with such a show of mystery, that it was all for kissing a young lady by moonlight! ha, ha, ha! I protest to Jupiter, they would have made me believe he had been caught eating an infant; but I thought from the beginning there must be some mistake in the matter; and I was sure enough it was so, when I found out from whom he derived those pretty blue eyes of his. But still I cannot quite pardon him. Well, well; we must e'en take good hope he will mend ere he die."

"Die!" replied the centurion; "do you talk of dying to one that has scarcely yet begun to live! Come, come,

Valerius, I hope, after all, you shall never get into a worse scrape."

"And if I do," said I, "I hope I shall always be equally fortunate in my jailers."

"By the beard of Jove!" quoth Sabinus, "it needs no great skill to see that you have been fortunate in that respect. I swear that, if the truth were known, you are almost as unwilling to be taken out of this tower now, as you were last night to be taken away from another."

"O Master Kæso," quoth she again, "when will you have done with your joking? ha, ha! Well, your father loved a jest in his time himself; but now he, I suppose, is quiet enough. And how is the old gentleman, and how does he wear? Can he still set in his porch of a fine morning, and listen to the news, as he used to do, with his cup of old Falernian at his knee?"

"I trust in all the gods, good dame," was his answer, "I trust the old grasshopper can still chirp when the sun shines. But, to tell you the truth, it is long since I have seen him; and if this young blade has no objection, I mean to pay him a visit this very night. I am only just come home from Britain, you must know, and have not yet had leisure to salute my Lares since my return. So to horse, my boy, Valerius; old folks go early to bed, and I swear to you I shall be ill-pleased if I don't arrive in time to partake of the sleeping-cup."

I said something about being very anxious to return as soon as possible to Rome; but the centurion answered me with another shout of laughter, and saying, "Come, come, she's safe enough, I'll warrant her,—I suppose you think every one gets out of jail as easily as yourself,"—seized me by the arm, and began to force me towards the staircase.

In short, I found it was out of the question to disapprove of any of the schemes of Sabinus; so, having saluted the old woman, and flung my purse to her children (who, by-the-way, still regarded me with looks of considerable apprehension), I accompanied my friend with a good grace to the door of the old tower. I made inquiry before I went forth concerning the old soldier likewise; but I could easily gather from the expression

of face with which his wife accompanied her indistinct reply, that he had, long before that time, reached a state in which she felt little desire to exhibit him. The centurion whistled as he stepped across the threshold, and there forthwith drew near a soldier, wearing the Prætorian helmet (now sufficiently familiar to my sight), and leading in his hand three horses. In the rear I recognised, not without satisfaction, the busy countenance of my friend Dromo, whose ass did not appear quite so eager to join the party as its rider.

A few sturdy thumps, however, at last brought the Cretan close to us, who saluted me with great appearance of joy, and then whispered into my ear, "Great Jove! we must keep silence for the present. What a story I have to tell when we are alone; and, by Heavens! I suppose there is one to hear likewise—but all in good season. We must not crack nuts before monkeys. I have a letter for you," he added, "from Sextus, and another from Licinius; but you shall not have them till we are done with our ride."

The centurion sprang with great agility on the back of his trusty war-horse, who seemed to rejoice in the feeling of his weight; and we were soon in motion. I asked no questions, either about the course we were to pursue, or the distance at which the place of our destination was situated; but rode by his side so silently that he bestowed on me many good-natured rebukes, for suffering a little affair of love to distress me so greatly.

"Cheer up now, good Valerius," quoth he, "and do not make me repent of carrying you to my father's house, by showing the old man, who has had enough of troubles in his day, such a countenance as must make him think of Orcus, even although he did not know himself to be near its gates. It is more than a year since I have seen him, and, by Jove! he must not have occasion to reproach me with bringing him a melancholy guest."

This sort of speech he repeated so often that I at last thought the best way would be to tell him frankly the true history of the adventure, from whose immediate

consequences to myself he had so kindly delivered me. I told him, therefore, every thing about both Thraso and Athanasia, and, indeed, kept nothing from him in the whole matter, except only what referred to the impression made on my own mind by what I had read of the Christian book; for, as to this subject, it was one which I totally despaired of being able to make him in any measure comprehend; and besides, the state of my own mind was still so uncertain in regard to it, and my information so imperfect, that I could not trust myself with speaking of it to any one, until I should have had leisure for more both of reading and of reflection. On hearing, however, who Athanasia was, and on perceiving how deeply I was interested in her, the kind centurion was not only quite satisfied that my melancholy demeanour was not inexcusable, but, entering like a true friend into so much as he understood of my troubles, he assumed, as he rode by my side, an air of seriousness and concern which, in spite of all the kindness I had experienced at his hands, was more than I had expected.

He preserved total silence for some minutes after hearing my story, and then, shaking his head, said, "In truth, my dear Valerius, you have very much distressed me by this communication. I thought it was merely some little idle frolic, born of an hour, and to be forgotten in a day; but if things be as you have told me, I cannot refuse you all my sympathy. Would to Heaven I had it in my power to offer you more!"

"Dear Sabinus," said I, "I know not how to thank you. You saw me but a few days ago the merriest young fellow that ever trod the pavement of Rome. You saw me happy in the moments that passed, and full of glad hopes for all that were to come; but now I feel myself quite changed in all things. Almost I wish I had never left my British fields; and yet, if I had staid there, I should never have seen Athanasia."

"Poor fellow!" quoth he, laying his hand on the mane of my horse, "I perceive there is, indeed, no trifling in your case. Yet compose yourself; for I see the tears are standing in your eyes. Compose yourself, and consider that whatever chances there may be in your

favour will never be increased or bettered by despondence." He paused another minute or two, and proceeded—"The worst of the whole is this new bitterness of Cesar against these Christians. Except during Nerva's time, indeed, there was always some punishment to be feared by them, in case of being detected; but there was a way of managing things in almost every case, and people were well enough disposed to grant immunities, which were always attended with some good to the Fisk. Nero and Domitian, to be sure, acted otherwise—but then these were madmen; and besides, they did so only by fits and starts. But now, when a prince like Trajan has really taken up the matter, it is no wonder that one should think of it a good deal more seriously. One cannot help thinking he must have had some good reason before he began—that is one thing; and having once begun, he is not the man to drop it lightly—that is another and a still more weighty consideration. Do you think there is positively no chance of the poor girl giving up this foolish dream, when she finds what a condition it has exposed her to?"

"No," said I; "I am sure she will not, nor can I wish it should be otherwise with her."

"Well," he resumed, "I enter into your feelings so far, my dear friend, on that point likewise. By Jove! I cannot imagine you to have been so deeply smitten with a girl of a flighty unsteady character. But then this is not a case to be considered or talked upon on common principles. It is no light thing to be exposed to such examinations as are now set afoot for these people; and if she behaves herself so resolutely as you seem to expect, what is the end of it? I consider it highly probable—for there is no friendship in uncandid speaking—I consider it as highly probable that, in spite of all her friends can do, they will banish her at the very least; scarcely dare I speak of it, but even worse than banishment has heretofore befallen Romans—ay, and Roman ladies too, and quite as high in birth and place as Athanasia."

"My dear Sabinus," said I, "do not imagine that now, for the first time, all these things are suggested to me.

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Imagine rather how, thinking of them continually, and unable for a moment to expel them from my mind, I have spent these miserable hours ever since she was taken away from my sight. Her friends too—her relatives, alas ! what must not be their alarm and consternation—if, indeed, they know any thing of what has happened—but that, I think, is scarcely to be supposed. Her absence, however, must of itself be sufficient to render them utterly wretched. Her poor friend Sempronius—alas ! what grief must be hers.”

“The thing was done at such an hour, and with so much despatch,” quoth the centurion, “that I think it is almost impossible it should have made much noise as yet. If there was in the family no suspicion that the young lady had any connection with any of these people, you may depend on it they must be in a state of the most perfect perplexity. How will they account for her absence ? They will perceive well enough that she had gone out in secret during the night. I lay my life they take it for granted she has had some private intrigue, and has gone off with her lover.”

“Alas, Sabinus, when they hear the truth, it will be still worse than this in their eyes. Yet it appears fit that no time should be lost in making them acquainted with the real state of the case. Her two uncles, Lucius and Velius, must both be informed of it. And yet, how is it that I, who have never seen the one, and have but just been introduced to the other, shall venture upon making such a disclosure to them ? Oh, Sabinus, I foresee that, in all these things, I shall have need of your counsel and your help.”

“You shall have them both, my dear boy,” said he, “you shall have them both to the uttermost. But it seems to me that there is no question at all about the propriety of telling the relatives of the lady all you know. Licinius is probably well acquainted with them ; and you could not find any one more proper, or more able for saying whatever is necessary. I am now almost sorry for having prevented your immediate return to the city ; and yet this night will soon be over, —we shall get into Rome early to-morrow, and till then

it is probable nothing could have been done, at any rate."

"But Athanasia herself—"

"Ah! that indeed is a point of some difficulty also. It was merely from having remembered who the men were that rode off with you, that I was enabled to learn so soon whither you yourself had been conveyed. But the party consisted of a few men out of almost every one of our cohorts,—those, in short, that were on duty, scattered up and down in different parts of the city; and I may not find it very easy to discover who had the care of any other individual."

"But Athanasia—"

"True," said he, "I had not thought of it. There was but one female besides herself, I think, in the whole party. That will furnish a clew. You may rely on it, I shall easily find out the place to which they have taken her; but then, where and at what distance that may be, Heaven only knows; for it seemed as if every prisoner was to be carried to a separate place of confinement. It is very likely the girl may be lying in some other watch-tower along the coast here, just as you yourself were. These are generally built in sequestered situations; and therefore I think it highly probable the whole assembly may have been dispersed among them. At all events, even if we knew where she is, we could do nothing at present. Come, cheer up, now you have unburdened yourself of all this load. Come, now, do cheer up as well as you can, and I promise you I shall be ready to start as early as ever you please in the morning."

"I will, I will," said I; "I will do every thing I can to prevent any gloom from being thrown over your meeting with your own family."

"Family!" said he; "alas! you speak as if there were a whole houseful of them, when in truth there is no one besides my old father and mother, who are now left to recline by themselves at a board which I remember to have seen surrounded with as blithe a group as ever man had pleasure in looking on. Now all are dead save one, and he must live almost always at a dis-

tance. Alas ! how little for the sake of themselves is it that kind parents rear children. The house that is full of the noise of mirth while they are young is gradually deserted by them as they grow up, until at length, when there is most need of comfort, no comfort is at hand. As for me, I have no opportunity of doing otherwise than I do. I make a run from Rome (when I am there) as often as I am able ; but now it is long, as I told you, since I was last with them, and therefore I can scarcely expect to see them now without observing some change."

"Come," said I, "you almost make it appear necessary for me to take up the part of a comforter in my turn. I perceive it is the listening to my story that has saddened you, and now you are looking upon all things with a heavy eye."

"Nay, nay," quoth he, "I shall not permit you to say that of me neither. Behold yon tall pine, that rises over these houses from among all the other trees that are about them,—that is the tree, my dear Valerius, beneath which I sported when I was a child ; and nobody shall say that I am sorry to see it again. It grows hard by my father's house, and throws its shade upon the place where the old man has his favourite seat. We shall soon pass through the village, and our house is only a very little way beyond it."

By this time the moon was in her full splendour, and nothing could be more beautiful than the scenery of the native place of Sabinus, as we drew near to its precincts. A little gentle stream, which kissed the path along which we were riding, did not desert us as we entered the village, but murmured all through its humble street. Street, indeed, I should not say,—for there were dwelling-houses on the one side only, the other being occupied with nothing but gardens, in the most of which I saw the Doric portico of a small marble temple, whose white pillars were reflected along with the surrounding poplars, upon the quiet surface of the grassy-margined rivulet. In front of the temple a low bridge of one arch crossed the stream, and there we were met by a troop of young maidens, who seemed to be moving towards the sacred place with some purpose of devotion, for they

were singing as they went, in alternate measures, a hymn to Venus, the goddess of the shrine; and in their hands they carried the garlands of white roses, as if for some votive celebration. Some of the damsels recognised Sabinus as they passed us, and, without interrupting their chant, saluted him kindly with their laughing eyes. We halted our horses, and saw them proceed all together into the sacred enclosure, which they did, not by means of the bridge, although they were close by it, but by wading hand in hand through the stream below—whose pebbles, as it appeared from the evenness of their motion, dared not to offer any violence to the delicate feet that trod upon them.

“Happy creatures!” said I to the centurion; “of a surety they think these moonbeams shine on nothing but glad faces like their own. Alas! with what heart does poor Athanasia at this moment contemplate this lovely heaven!”

“Nay, Valerius,” quoth he, “if people were not to be contented with their own share of sorrow, would the world, think ye, be worth living in? I hope Athanasia herself will ere long sing again by the moonlight. But stop, here is my own old haunt, the abode of our village barber; and now I think of it, perhaps it might be as well that you and Dromo should remain here for a moment, till I ride on to the house, and let them know you are coming, for the sudden sight of strange faces might alarm the old folks at this hour.”

He had scarcely said so, when the tonsor himself, hearing, I suppose, the sound of our horses’ feet, ran out with his razor and basin in his hand, to see what might be the matter.

“Ah, Virro, my good Virro,” quoth the centurion, “with joy do I once more behold your face. Well, the girls still sing, and Virro still shaves; so every thing, without question, goes well in the old place.”

“The centurion himself!” replies the barber; “so Venus smile upon me, it is the good centurion Kæso Sabinus, who I began to think would never come back again. Here, boy, bring out a cup of the best; for though I see he is bound for home, the centurion shall not pass

my door without wetting his lips. Alight, I pray you : well, I see you won't do that ; but, at least, you shall kiss the rim of the goblet."

"I will," said he, "I promise you, my good friend, and that in a minute or two ; but I must first salute my father ; and in the mean time I leave with you in pledge, good Virro, my excellent friend here, and the most knowing Cretan that ever landed at Brundusium. Dismount, Valerius ; I shall be with you again ere Virro can half smoothen the chin of Dromo, which even this morning showed no small need of trimming."

"Well, well," said the tonsor, "eagles will have their own way wherever they go. Be speedy, and return to us."

The centurion in the mean time had set the spur to his charger ; and we, in obedience to his command, submitted ourselves to the guidance of the oily-faced little barber. A stripling was already holding two horses at the door, but another came out and took care of our animals, and we entered, exchanging courteous salutations, the tonsorial penetralia.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY were occupied by as various and talkative a company as the imagination of Lucilius ever assembled in such a place. In the middle of the room, which was spacious, though low-roofed, hung a large shield of brass, with a dozen mouths of flame blazing around the edge of its circumference, close beside which sat a man with a napkin tucked about his neck, the one side of whose visage, still besmeared with a thick coat of lather, testified that the curiosity of Virro had induced him to abandon a yet uncompleted job. The half-trimmed physiognomy, however, displayed no sign of impatience, and the barber himself seemed not to think any apology necessary, for he resumed his operations with an air of

great cheerfulness, saying, "Neighbours all, neighbours all, here is Kæso Sabinus, that is now the centurion, come once more to gladden the old village with his merry face, and that, I promise you, is prettily tanned since we knew him first."

This piece of news appeared not a little to interest several of those who were sitting under the tonsor's roof.

"Ha!" said one, "the jolly centurion! well, has he brought home a wife with him at last? for the talk was that he had been seen at the amphitheatre, paying great court to one of the richest ladies in Rome, and one of the prettiest withal."

"A wife!" quoth the barber; "I believe you shall as soon see myself bring home a wife as the centurion. No, no; your gay centurions and barbers can do very well without wives. But if he is to have one, I shall be happy to hear she is rich; for centurions, after all, sometimes carry most of their silver upon their helmets, as we do most of our brass on our basins; ha! ha! what say you, young master, are we simple villagers to believe what is reported?"

"Indeed," said I, "I never heard of it before."

"There, now," quoth he, "and if you did you would not say so. Well, I like to see a man keep a secret."

Almost all that were present joined in a cordial roar of laughter when they heard him say this; but he, nothing daunted, dismissed the person whose beard he had now entirely scraped off, and motioning to Dromo to occupy the abdicated place, proceeded, with the most enviable coolness, to whitewash the bristly Cretan in his turn.

"The centurion," resumes he, "has been a long while absent. Well, to see how some people get on in the world! but I wish many others deserved their good luck as well as the centurion."

"Yes," quoth another, "they say he is high in favour with Cesar, and that he has a very fair chance of being a tribune at least before he dies. Well, I am glad on't, for the sake of his old father."

"And I, for the sake of his mother," cries an old woman, who was serving some of the company with a cup

of wine; "a blithe heart will hers be when she sees him in all his bravery. It was always a pretty youth,—there was never a merrier lad about a village than Kæso Sabinus, no, nor a kinder, neither; many is the time and oft he has taken my pitcher off my head, and carried it all the way across the road for me."

"If it please you, friend," said another of them (turning to the old dame), "is this the same Sabinus that has lately been in Britain?"

"Britain!" quoth the dame; "I never heard that name before—Britain! I know it not; I know not where he hath been, but they told me it was over the sea, perhaps in Palestine."

"Tut, dame," interrupted the barber, "you think every one goes to Palestine, because your own boy carried a spear with Titus; but you know they ruined the city, and killed all the Jews and Christians, and there is no occasion for sending centurions thither now."

"Killed all the Jews and Christians, said you?" quoth another. "I think the old dame has the better of you as to that point at least, Virro. By Jove, I don't believe Trajan himself will ever be able to kill them all; their cursed superstition breeds like a rabbit, or spreads like a pestilence. It was but last night that a hundred of them were taken together in one place, eating human flesh."

"Human flesh!" quoth the barber. "Oh, ye gods, why do ye endure such barbarians!"

"Human flesh!" echoed Dromo, springing from his seat; and I looked at him, and saw that the barber in his horror had made in truth a deep incision upon the cheek of the poor man. The blood, oozing from the cut, had already traced a river of crimson upon the snowy surface of his well soaped chin. It was this that had deranged the philosophic composure and customary phlegm of my Cretan; and no wonder; but the enthusiastic tonsor took no notice of what occurred.

"Great Jove!" he proceeded, and he pointed to the roof with his razor as he spoke—"great Jove! I adjure thee! are all thy lightnings spent! is there never a thunderbolt remaining!"

"In the mean time," quoth one of the bystanders,

"they are in the hand, not of Jove, but of Trajan, and he, I think, cannot now be accused of treating these wretches with too much lenity. You have all heard of the death of Thraso."

"We have, we have," cried another; "but what was a single individual to this great assembly? what a sight will it be the day they are all executed!"

"I think," said another (and it was the same person who had inquired whether our centurion were that very Sabinus that had been absent in Britain), "I think you are overrating the numbers of that assembly. It is enough as it is, but they have swelled the matter grievously, in bringing the intelligence of it even to this little distance. I heard of no more than a dozen."

The man who said this was sitting in a corner by himself, as if he had no acquaintance in the room except indeed a single youth, who, I thought, I knew not why, must needs be his freedman; but I suppose I had observed some trivial symptom of service, or of more than the mere obeisance of equal courtesy. The stranger (for such he seemed) had probably taken that day a considerable journey, for his tunic and boots were covered with thick dust, and the hair on his head had much semblance of disorder. He was attired in the plainest manner possible, but, notwithstanding, there was something about him which gave one the idea of rank superior to that of the company in which he was seated; and his complexion was so exceedingly dark, that I could not help thinking to myself—"Well, I am not the only provincial in the room, however; here is certainly some noble African or Asiatic." Whoever he was, he seemed not to covet observation, for I perceived that he took notice when my eye rested upon him, and that he shifted his position, as if to throw his countenance more into the shade.

This man had a cup of wine and a bunch of grapes before him, and indeed few of the company were less comfortably provided; for it was sufficiently apparent that Virro was the tavern-keeper as well as the barber of the village. I had little doubt that the horses I had seen at

the door were those of him and his companion, and that the riders were now refreshing themselves for the pursuance of their journey.

"You have not told me, however," said he, after a pause, "whether or not this be the same Sabinus that was lately in Britain."

"Sir," said I, hearing him repeat the inquiry, "it is the same; I myself came in the same ship with him from Britain, but a few days ago: he is a centurion in the Prætorian bands."

"Yes," replied the stranger, "I guessed in truth it must be the same; for I remember no other of that rank bearing the same name."

"If you are acquainted with him," said I, "you may have an opportunity of seeing him immediately, for I expect him here every moment to take me to his father's villa along with him."

"Well," quoth the barber, who by this time had ended, without further misadventure, the trimming of the Cretan, "well, I hope he will stay for a moment when he does come, and then we shall be sure to hear the truth as to this story about the Christian assembly. They may talk as they please, but may Jove devote me, if I had Trajan's ring upon my finger for one night, I would take good care this should be the last of them."

"And how, friend," said the stranger who had spoken before, "by what means, if I may ask you, should you propose so speedily to do away with this fast-spreading abomination?"

"By Jove," quoth he, "I'll tell you how I should do. I would place myself thus in my tribunal"—(he took his seat at a little table, beside a goblet of wine, as he spoke)—"I would seat myself thus in the midst of a field, as Cato and the great censors of old used to do. I would cause Rome to be emptied—man, woman, and child should pass before me; and every one that did not acknowledge the gods as he passed, by all the gods, he should be strung upon a tree, in presence of all the people. What avails watching, and prying, and spying, and surprising? I should make a shorter work of it, I

throw. By Jove, I think I should show you what it is to deal in the old root-and-branch fashion, for once. I would let all the world see that I can let blood."

"I'll be bound you would," quoth Dromo, rubbing his chin; "and I hope the world would thank you for your pains."

"Come, come, jolly boy," quoth the tonsor, "there is a salve for every sore. Here is a cup of such wine as the emperor himself would not disdain to moisten his lips withal. Taste—drink—forget the cut, and sit more steady the next time you hear such a story. May Hermes be my guide, good friends, if he did not shake as much under my hands as if the Christians had attempted to make a meal of himself; and if they had done so, would they not have had a savoury banquet? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" re-echoed half the company, and Dromo was fain to accept of the cup that was offered him, instead of attempting to make any further impression on the jocular barber. But before he had seen the foundation of it, Sabinus himself re-appeared at the door, and summoned us to go with him. The guests of Virro, however, prevailed on him to enter for a moment, and the centurion having taken his seat in the midst of the company, their conversation was resumed.

"You may say what you will of them," quoth one of the company, who I think had not before spoken since our entrance, "you may say what you please about them, but I believe I have seen a little more of them than any one among you all, and I cannot bring myself to believe every thing I hear said concerning their superstition. I neither know, nor desire to know, what their faith is; but, by Jupiter, in point of practice I have known some of them behave so as might shame the best of ourselves; and I shall make bold to say, that if their religion does not create goodness, it at least does not always extinguish it."

"Ay, master goldsmith," quoth the barber, "you were always fond of having an opinion of your own; and, pray, what is it that you have had occasion to know

about the Christians, more than the rest of us who hear you? If you mean that you have seen some of them die bravely in the amphitheatre, why, that we have all heard of at least, and I think nobody disputes it."

"No, master barber," replied he, "that is not what I was thinking of; for, by Jove, whoever has lived in Rome as much as I have done, must be pretty well convinced that a bold death is no evidence of an innocent life. Why, I have seen your common thief-knave, when he knew he could do no better, brace you his nerves for the extremity, and die like a very Hercules. He must be a pitiful fellow, indeed, that would shame himself in the eyes of a whole city. If it were wished that wretches should expire like themselves, I take it, the best way would be to make them expire by themselves. No, that was not what I was thinking of. By Jove, I would rather judge of a man by his living than his dying—ay, or of a woman either."

"True, true; 'tis all true you say," rejoins Virro; "and pray, what have you got to tell us about the life, then, of all the Christians?"

"Not much," said he; "not much, master barber. Only, if they were all like one that I know, I should not be ashamed to commend them—ay, if it were before the face of the emperor himself. But you shall hear. My old mother (peace to her manes), was passing the Salarian one day last year, and there came by a hot-headed young spark, driving four abreast in a chariot as fiercely as if he had been a second Nero in the Circus. He called out, that I believe; but the dame was deaf, and whether he tried to pull up or no, I know not, but over she went, and one of the horses trod upon her old limbs as she fell. Another of the same sort came close behind, and I have been told they were running a race; but however that might be, on they both passed like a whirlwind, and my poor mother was left by herself among the flying dust. But the gods had mercy on her, they sent a kind heart to her aid; and, by all Olympus, it beats in the breast of a Christian."

"So the Christian took up your old mother and was kind to her, friend Marcus?"

"Kind!—why, she was carried into one of the stateliest, grandest villas on that side of Tiber, and tended for six weeks by a noble lady, as if she had been, not my mother, but her own; and this lady, friends—by Jove, I suspected it not for long after—this lady was a Christian; but I shall not say how I found it out, nor would I mention the thing at all but among honest men and good friends. She is a Christian, that is certain. I would give more gold than I ever showed in my booth at the Saturnalia, rather than hear she was one of those whom the Prætorians seized last night. But I shall hear, when I return to the city, both where they were taken and who they were."

"Where they were taken!" said the stranger, whose appearance I described a little while ago; "I can tell you well enough where they were taken, my good man; it was not far from the Appian Way, within one of the old monuments there,—the monument, it is said, of one of the noble branches of the Sempronii."

"Of the Sempronii?" said the goldsmith. "Phœbus, Apollo, shield us!" and I think his colour changed as suddenly as ever it did in the cheek of a damsel, and from that moment he became as silent as hitherto he had been communicative.

The rest of the company were as quiet as he for some little space. The swarthy stranger, the silence yet continuing, arose from his seat, laid a piece of money upon the table, and moved towards the door, as if to take his departure. The barber also rose up as if to assist him in mounting, but he said to him, "Sit still, I pray you, my friend;" at the same time beckoning with his finger to the goldsmith, who, with a very dejected countenance, followed him into the street of the village. What passed between them there we perceived not; but the artificer re-entered not the chamber till some moments after we had heard the departing tread of the stranger's horses. When he did come in again, he had the appearance of being in great confusion, and drank off the cup of wine which stood before Sabinus, in a way that showed him quite unaware of what he was

doing. Shortly after he also took his departure, and we ourselves, bidding adieu to the jovial tonsor, walked slowly towards the paternal mansion of the centurion.

CHAPTER V.

AND we very soon reached it ; for, as I have already said, it was situated but a little way out from the village. Some thick and tall hedges of beech intervened between it and the public way, which then at last took a direction different from that of the stream along whose banks we had been riding, leaving its cool waters to glide away towards the left among the green meadows and peaceful groves of the ancient Sabinus. Close to the house itself flourished, among other trees, the sad cypress—the only one the proprietor was at last to take with him. The dwelling itself was modest and low-roofed, having no external ornament but a single portico, with a few statues ranged between its pillars. We entered by this portico, and found the feeble old man sitting by himself (for his wife had already retired to her own chamber), in an apartment immediately adjacent, wherein the beams of the moon, having partial access, were mingled with the almost equally soft and subdued light of a painted lamp suspended from the ceiling. The father of my friend had all the appearance of being sinking apace beneath the progressive influence of the most hopeless of maladies—old age ; yet he received me with an air, not of cheerfulness, but of kindness. The evening breeze, which found admission to his couch through the open pillars of the porch, he seemed to be inhaling eagerly, while his countenance exhibited in its wan and faint lines the pleasure with which its coolness affected him. Beside him were placed baskets of fragrant roses, gathered from the abundance of his gar-

dens. The young Vernæ,* who from time to time brought in these newly pulled flowers, came into the chamber with a decent appearance of sobriety and concern; but they were never long gone before we could hear them laughing and shouting again at their play. "Poor children!" quoth the old man, observing that his son heard the noise with some displeasure; "check not the poor children in their mirth, Kæso;—why should they trouble themselves with thinking of the not remote victim of Orcus?"

To which the centurion replied, somewhat softening as he spoke that loud and cheerful tone with which he was accustomed to address all persons, "Courage, my dear father, you must not speak so of yourself. Cerberus, I perceive, has only been making an ineffectual snap at you, and you will be growing younger again after all this."

At which the old man shook his head, without any external sign of emotion, and replied, in a low monotonous voice, "Younger in the wrong way, my boy; for I become every day smaller in body, and feebler, and less able to do any thing to help myself. Nor am I unconscious that I have seen my due proportion of time. And yet, O fast sliding gentle brook, which I see between these paternal trees, I am still loath to exchange thee for Styx, and to lose the cheerful and sacred light of the sun and moon. I wish only I were once more able to repair with thy stream to the banks of Father Tiber, that I might salute the good emperor, who has been so kind to my son, and who would treat even an old broken-down and long-retired soldier, like myself, with more favour than is to be expected from Rhadamanthus. Trajan lives (long may he live) and is in vigour, and may carry whither he will his eagles, which never droop their wings; but I—an old man and a feeble—feel full surely that it is the lot of human nature to tend downwards at last. As clouds let down their drops, so the many-peopled earth lets fall dismissed ghosts upon the Stygian shore."

While he was saying this, and other things in the

* Children of domestic slaves.

same strain, an ancient Egyptian slave, who seemed to have the chief management of every thing about the house, came into the chamber, and after desiring some of the boys to bring forth refreshments, took his place on a low stool by the foot of his master's couch, yet with the air of one accustomed to share both in the meals and the conversation of the family. "Come, Tarna," said the centurion to him as he sat down, "what has become of all your boasted philosophy? Why is it that you do not take care to inspire our old friend with notions of less gloominess? Why is it that you do not bring out for his use some of those old stores with which, when I was young, you were more willing to treat my ears than they were to attend to them?"

"Nay, I know not how it is," said the old man, before the Egyptian could make any answer,—“nay, nay, I liked very well to listen to Tarna's fine theories when I was able to walk about the fields, and to take my evening cup beneath the shadow of the old pine upon the green; but now I would rather have him be silent, for he fills me only with troublesome thoughts, which task my mind to wrestle with them, and which always end in discomposing my serenity. He is a philosopher,” continued he, turning to me; “and you must know he is one of those they call the Epicureans. But whatever others may say, I think their doctrines are all either fantastic and unprofitable, or infidel and wicked. Do not trouble me any more, dear Tarna, with any of your speeches. Keep your mind to yourself. Allow me to believe as all my fathers did, and to contemplate, not only the same sepulchre in which their urns are placed, but the same dim regions in which all their shades are now expecting the greeting of another descendant.”

“Nay, sir,” then said the Egyptian, addressing himself to me, “my good master may say whatever else he pleases against my doctrines, but I am sure they appear to me to be as tranquillizing against death as all men must admit they are in themselves grand to contemplate. To me it seems, that by the rushing shower of atoms which moves everywhere through space, the mind is soothed and soothed, as by the sound of a great river

carrying continually the watery offspring of the mountains into the bosom of the wide ocean."

"Nilus—Nilus, for example," interrupted the smiling centurion.

"Even so, if it please you," continued the philosophic slave, "even let it be believed that my mind cannot easily divest itself of the image of that king of rivers, with the magnificence of which my eyes in infancy and happy youth were familiar. The mind, sirs, appears to me to be soothed by the contemplation of infinity, even as the ear of an Egyptian sleeper is calmed by the eternal music of the rolling Nilus. It mingles itself with that which it contemplates; it perceives—it feels itself to be a liquid part of that great and endless stream of universal being—a part which has been casually arrested and detained, but which will soon mingle again and be scattered away in a thousand fragments, to wander no one knows whither through the great all-receiving void—not to lose existence, for in that my dear master entirely misunderstands me—but to cease from feeling as a Valerius, a Sabinus, or a Tarna."

During all this the old man kept regarding his Egyptian with a placid smile, shaking his head, however, every now and then, in token of his incredulity. But I said to the philosophic slave, for it was to me in truth he appeared to be chiefly addressing himself,—

"What is this you have said? Do you assert that I can cease to be Valerius, to feel as Valerius, and yet not lose my existence? Can I *be*, and yet not be *myself*?"

"Most easily," replied he, "most easily. The divided fragments may move about for a thousand years, before it befall any of them to be stopped in some future combination of atoms. These, it is manifest, only tremble and suffer when they form part of a soul, but are immediately released from all pain or mischance when this confinement and cohesion are at an end, and they being dispersed regain liberty and wander about singly, as of yore; for, as our great dispeller of delusions says, 'When death is, we are not.' If, therefore, Sabinus shrinks from the fear of death, it is an idle fear. Does he not perceive that when death arrives, Sabinus is no

longer to be found? Whatever its effects may be, they must affect, not him, but an army of innumerable disjointed essences, in no one of which could he by any means be able to recognise himself."

"To make a very short story out of a very long one," interrupted the centurion, "you don't think life is worthy of the name of existence; that being so, it is no wonder you should think lightly of death."

"Mistake me not," quoth the sage, "you do me great wrong if you take me for the entertainer of such loose notions as these. No, no; life is existence; I not only admit that, but I assert that it is the business of every man, and the sole true object of human wisdom, to render life while it endures as pleasant as is possible. Though the atoms be fortuitously, and not permanently, united, there is no reason why, while their union lasts, they should not have their corners smoothed off, and lie as comfortably together as is possible. Earthly pleasure consists in a bland juxtaposition of atoms necessarily, though temporarily, connected; the removal of pain implies the presence of that calm quiescence which pervades the nobleness of the unenclosed ALL. To exist in this shape we are compelled; it is our business to render our existence as near an approach to felicity as we may."

"Fill your cup, good Tarna," quoth the centurion; "I am no great philosopher, yet methinks I can see the drift of this part of your story. Fill up your goblet, most venerable Epicurean, and see (if it be not below your dignity) whether the atoms which, by a fortuitous and temporary juxtaposition, have formed your throat, will not feel their corners very philosophically softened by the rushing of a little rivulet of good Falernian—one cup of which, saving your presence, I hold to be more worthy of wetting my guttural atoms, than all the water that ever sported its music between Memphis and Alexandria."

While the slave and the centurion were thus discoursing, I wish you had been present, that you might have seen with what delight the old man listened to the words that his son uttered. Propped up among the cushions, and scarcely sufficiently master of his trembling hand to be

able to lift the cup to his mouth, he appeared to taste, as it were, the pleasure of a renovated existence, in contemplating the brown health and strong muscular fabric of the inheritor of his name. The hearty masculine laugh with which my friend usually concluded his observations was, I take leave to think, richer music to his ears than ever Egyptian heard in the dark rollings of the Nile, or Epicurean dreamt of in the airy dance of atoms. I suspect he was more reconciled to the inevitable stroke of fate by considering that he was to leave such a representative behind him, than by any argument which either his own superstition or the philosophy of his attendant could suggest to him. In return for the obvious admiration of his sire, the centurion, without question, manifested every symptom of genuine affection. Yet, I think, the instinctive consciousness of his own strength made the piety of the robust son assume an air more approaching to that of patronage than might have been altogether becoming. If such a fault there was, however, it was quite plain that it escaped the notice of the old man himself, who continued, till Tarna insisted upon his retiring to bed, to gaze upon my friend, and listen to his remarks, with looks of exultation ineffable.

The centurion retired with his father, that he might take farewell of his parents both together, in their private chamber; so that I was left alone with Tarna for some time, and it was then that, in my juvenile simplicity, I could not help expressing my surprise at finding, in a servile condition, a man possessed of such acquirements as his, and addicted to such pursuits.

"It would argue little," he replied, "in favour either of the pursuits or the acquirements you are pleased to talk of with so much respect, if they tended only to make me repine at the place which has been allotted me—it is no matter whether by the decrees of fate or the caprices of fortune. And after all, I am not of opinion that any such external circumstances can much affect the real happiness of any one. Give to him who has been born a slave what men are pleased to call his freedom; in a few weeks he will become so much accus-

tomed to the boon, that he will cease to think of it. Heap wealth upon him ; to wealth also he will gradually become habituated. Rank—power ; with all it is the same. It is in the mind only that the seat of happiness is placed ; and there it never can be, unless in companionship with thoughts that look down upon and despise being affected by trifling things.”

“And are such,” said I, “the views of all those who follow your sect ?”

“I wish it were so,” he replied ; “but ere you remain long in the city, you will perceive well that it is quite the reverse. There you will meet with not a few, philosophers only in the name, who, having small means of subsistence, but being desirous of leading a luxurious and agreeable life, become teachers of such doctrines as may accord best with the vicious inclinations of those who are most likely to entertain them. These persons assume and disgrace too often the name of Epicureans. They are seen everywhere at feasts, crowned with myrtle, and fawning upon gouty senators ; and whenever a boar’s head appears, they are sure to call it worthy of Meleager for its size. Their conversation is made up of stale jests about Charon and his boat, and the taking of auguries ; and, when finally inebriated, they roll upon the ground like those animals to whom, in consequence of the proceedings of such hypocritical pretenders, the ignorant have dared too often to liken the wisest of mankind. Such things I disdain ; I am satisfied to remain, as I was born, in the rank of *Æsop*, *Terence*, and *Epictetus*.”

By this time the centurion had returned. He had a lamp in his hand ; and he interrupted our conversation by saying to me, “Come, we start betimes, *Valerius* ; therefore we must to bed forthwith, and you, too,” said he, turning his jocular eye on the slave, “you too, my sweet cock of *Cyrene* ; you have already done enough for one night. I think you had better fold your wings, and compose yourself upon your roost. By *Jove* !” he continued, as we were passing to our apartments, “what with *Christians* on one side, and philosophers on the other, a man cannot go to bed in these times without

having his brain perplexed as much as if he were housed in the Labyrinth."

"The Labyrinth of Crete, do you mean?" quoth Dromo, who was ready waiting for me in the room where I was to sleep.

"Peace, you well-trimmed knave," replied the centurion, chucking him under the chin; "I suppose you think that, because you are a Cretan, there is never a labyrinth in the world to which you could not furnish a clew."

So saying, he stepped into a room immediately adjoining, and in a very few minutes I knew, from the heaviness of his breathing, that he was fast asleep.

"Oh, enviable temperament!" said I to myself; "you likened the slave to a bird. Methinks yourself are more deserving of the simile. The light and the air of heaven are sufficient to make you happy—your wings are ever strong—their flight ever easy—and the rain of affliction glides off them as soon as it falls. Sleep on, kind heart. It is only the troubles of a friend that can ever disturb your serenity."

I had undressed, and was in bed before Dromo interrupted my reflections by saying, in a tone of considerable confidence, "And now, Master Valerius, do you still continue, as much as two days ago, to disbelieve in filters, and despise enchantresses? You see what, with all my precaution, has come of this connection between Rubellia and the Neapolitan."

"In truth, Dromo," I replied, "it is visible that Pona had some share in leading the soldiers to the Christian assembly; but I am doubtful if that had any thing to do with the private affairs of the Lady Rubellia. As to that matter, I confess myself entirely in the dark."

"Dark indeed," quoth he, "must your observation have been, if you have yet to learn that, but for that accursed witch, nothing of all this had befallen; but if there be an edict against the Christians, there are twenty laws against enchantresses; and that both Pona and she that consulted her shall know well ere long, if they do not as yet know it; or may Cretan change places with Boeotian, and be ever henceforth a by-word for stupidity."

"Say on, good Dromo," I replied, "I am all ears; and as you appear to have been all eyes, I shall probably soon be more enlightened."

"Well," quoth he, "I am glad to find that you are in a mood to listen to me decently; for may Cretan Jove devote me, if ever I saw a pretty young gentleman, with nothing but a few insignificant mischances behind him, and all the fair world before him, carry himself after such a melancholy hang-head guise as you have done ever since we delivered you from your tower. Sextus said, when he sent me with the centurion, that he was sure you would be in need of much comforting; but, poor lad, I trow he did not suspect he had so much reason for saying so."

"But what as to Rubellia? Go on with your story, good Dromo."

"Well, well; you remember," said he, "where I took my station when you mounted those unfortunate steps upon the tower. I had not stood there many minutes, I think, before I heard somebody approaching on the side towards the city; and having no doubt it was Rubellia herself, I was busy preparing myself for giving her such a salutation as I thought would put a speedy end to her wandering for that night, at all events. On came the steps, but no Rubellia. No; you will start when you hear me say so—it was nobody but Xerophastes himself; and although he had laid aside the Greek mantle, and donned a boatman's black cloak for the nonce, I promise you I knew his stately gait well enough beneath all these new trappings. It was no part of my job, however, to attempt frightening the stoic, though that too, I think, might not, after all, have been so very difficult; for I swear to you he whistled as he went; and it is a sure sign, my master, a man's pulse beats not so calmly as it ought to do, when you hear him whistling among tombs in the moonlight, more especially when he has a private errand in his breast with him."

"And so you let him pass without doing any thing?"

"I did; I confess that I gave one or two groans, after he had gone on a few paces, but I did not observe him

much quicken his walk, and I believe, to do the man justice, he set it all down to the wind rustling among the trees. But I thought not much of him at all, to speak the truth ; for, said I to myself, ' Well, if it be as I have suspected for these two blessed days, and this master long-beard is really in league with the widow, the chances are, she herself is not far behind him.' I lay by, therefore, and expected in silence till I should hear another tread ; and in the mean time I spoke to you once or twice across the road, but you made me no answer, for which you know your own reasons."

"The reason," said I, "was a very simple one, I assure you. I had fallen asleep ; and no wonder, for you know how long I had been a watcher."

"Well," said he, "to say truth, I guessed as much, and it was nothing but the born tenderness of my disposition which made me cease from offering you any disturbance. I thought to myself I should surely be enough single-handed for the widow ; and besides, in case of need, I knew your waking would always be in my power."

"Admirably reasoned, Dromo," said I ; "and so it seems no need came, for you certainly never awakened me ; for which I may thank the bonds from which the centurion's kindness has just set me free. But you have atoned abundantly—I pray you get on with your tale."

"Presently," he resumed, "I heard footsteps, indeed, my good master ; and not footsteps alone, but voices, and not human voices alone neither, but the growling of those abominable dogs, with which I think both of us became better acquainted that night than we could have wished. Afraid of those foul creatures, I moved from the place as hastily as I could, till I came to a tree, the branches of which, springing low on the trunk, offered an opportunity for mounting, which I should have been a Bœotian indeed had I neglected. I mounted, and hiding myself as well as I could among the boughs, awaited the arrival of the party, which consisted—ay, stare if you will—of Xerophrastes and the widow, walking in front, in earnest talk by themselves, and the

Neapolitan witch in the rear, calming, as well as she could with her odious caresses, the hoarse throats of her brutal attendants. They halted just between the tree I had left and that which I had ascended, and though they spoke low enough, I promise you I could hear them distinctly."

"And what, in the name of Heaven, said they?"

"Are you sure,' said the widow, 'that this is indeed the girl whom Sextus went to see at the villa of Capito? Are you certain of it? Will you swear it is this same Athanasia? Can there be no mistake?"

"Mistake, lady, there is none,' replied the stoic. 'Pona was at the villa with her basket the very day Sextus went thither, and she saw them all walking together in the garden.'

"I did so, indeed, noble lady,' interrupted the witch, who by this time had come close up to them as they were halting; 'I did indeed see them; and I swear to you, she is a beautiful creature, though not to be talked of in the same year with my noble lady.'

"And this little Christian,' said the lady, as if to herself, 'it is she that has cost me all this trouble! It is for her that I have been insulted as never woman was by man: and they are both here in the tower, Pona?' said she. 'You are sure Sextus and this Athanasia are both together in the tower?"

"They are, lady,' quoth the witch; 'they are both in the tower, for I saw the lady go in by herself first, and then in went some dozen of those muffled blasphemers, and last of all went in he himself. I saw him not enter indeed, but I swear to you that I saw him here not twenty paces from hence, and he had with him that cunning slave of his' (meaning myself, sir), 'whose ugly face' (the foul woman added) 'I would know although it were disguised beneath all the washes that were ever mixed in the seething-pots of Calabria. I saw them here; they threw stones at these dogs while they were crouching at my feet; I myself was fain to escape from them, but I promise my noble lady I have already taken measures for abundant blessed revenge; and if she will let me say so, for my most noble lady—'

"'But what,' interrupted our long-beard, 'what will Licinius say? At least, my lady and my friend Pona will take good care that no suspicion of having had any hand in all this ever rests upon me? Sextus is a silly boy, without taste, judgment, or discretion; but Licinius is acute and powerful, and a poor rhetorician cannot stand against Licinius.'

"'Fear not,' said Rubellia; 'fear not, dear Xerophrates. Nobody shall appear in the matter except Pona, and as she tells you she has already given warning at the Capene Gate, the watch will be here on the instant. Be sure there are always a hundred men stationed off the Cœlian. Nothing can save them, unless we interfere in their behalf; and to that length, I think, it can scarcely be supposed we should carry our forbearance.'

"These words were scarcely out of her mouth, ere the soldiers, in good truth, were heard approaching; although they advanced, indeed, as quietly as possible, that the Christians might not have warning to disperse themselves, Xerophrates, on hearing them, ascended with great agility a tree just over-against mine, on the other side of the road. Rubellia retreated among the pines, and Pona alone, with her dogs, awaited the arrival of the guard. I, in the mean time, would have perilled a limb, I think, to be able to give you the alarm; but little did I suspect, that had I sought you where I left you, I should have sought for you there in vain. How, I pray you, did you contrive to get into the accursed tower?"

I told him I should give him the story another time at full length, and mentioned briefly the general outline of what had occurred. And then the Cretan proceeded with his narrative.

"I leave you to guess, Valerius, how my heart beat when I saw the witch lead the soldiers straight to the place where I supposed you were still sitting. I leave you to guess with what anxiety I saw the whole tower surrounded—surprised—entered—its secret tenants brought out,—and, above all, with what astonishment I saw you led out, the last of their number.

"I had neither time to think by what means all th'

had happened, nor the least power to interfere in your behalf. I saw you all mounted—guarded—borne away. Whither they carried you I was unable to make the smallest conjecture. I saw Sabinus speak to you, and then I had hope,—but that too failed. In brief, I saw all that passed, and did not venture down from my tree till the whole assembly, not forgetting Xerophrastes himself, had departed. Then at last down I came, and you may judge for yourself what a story I had to tell to young Licinius when I reached home.

“To do my dear boy justice, he behaved with as much spirit as might have done credit to any one of double his years. Instead of waiting to ponder and hesitate, as he used to do when his own matters perplexed him, he went from me straight to his father. I followed him, and would have listened to what passed between them; but the thickness of the door prevented me from very well understanding them. Your name, and the name of Athanasia, and the name of your friend the centurion, were almost the only words I could pick up. But before they had done with their conversation, Sabinus himself arrived, and he was immediately taken into the same chamber where they were. Licinius and he went out together soon afterward, and I think they walked towards the Palatine in the Capitol; but whithersoever they went, they had a good deal of work before them, for the day had advanced considerably before they returned. The centurion's horse was brought to the door shortly after, and my master desired me to accompany him; and they gave me these letters for you at the same time, which I had almost forgotten to deliver.”

Such was the story of the faithful Cretan. The letter of Sextus, which I first opened, contained nothing but expressions of affection, concern for what had befallen me, and anxiety to see me again. That of Licinius I have still preserved, and here it is.

LICINIUS to VALERIUS sends health.

“Since our Sabinus desires that I should write to you, although his own kindness renders it unnecessary that I

should do so, I cannot refuse. I understand little, my Valerius, of what has brought you into this condition, from which, not without difficulty overcome, you are, notwithstanding, speedily to be delivered. I guess that hastiness of various sorts, not, however, entirely without excuse in a person of your age, has been the means of implicating you in the affairs of a sect equally unworthy of your communication, whether you consider the country in which their superstition originated, or the barbarities with which it is stained. But even for beauty, my young friend, it becomes not a Roman, least of all a Valerius, to forget what is due to the laws of Rome, and the will of the prince. Consider with yourself how nearly you have escaped serious evil. Return to us, and forget what has passed, except for the lesson it must teach you. Of Rubellia and Xerophrastes I am unwilling to believe, without further examination, what has been told me by my slave Dromo. We shall speak of that and other matters when (which I hope will be early to-morrow) you once more give us the pleasure of seeing you. I have then much to say. Farewell."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM various interruptions, not necessary to be recited, the next day was already far advanced before the friendly centurion and myself once more drew near to the precincts of the city. When we reached at length the brow of the first declivity beyond the Anio, the sun was just about to sink behind the Janicular, and all the wide surface of the city lay before us bathed in the richness of his farewell beams. The innumerable sounds of the great Capitol, blended together as it were into one mighty whisper, seemed only to form part of the natural music of the air, and, but for some momentary echoes of a louder note, might almost have been confounded by the ear of a traveller with the universal hum of twilight insects, and the twitter of birds among the trees. We paused for a mo-

ment to contemplate the evening splendour of Rome ; and then rode slowly down the hill, at the base of which the path is ever darkened by the broad shadows of the cypress groves and funereal monuments of the Appian Way.

We advanced in silence through that region of melancholy magnificence, the natural effect of which was, as you will easily imagine, not a little deepened on my mind by the strong associations that connected with its scenery the causes of my own internal distresses. I scarcely knew whether I should be able of myself to recognise among so many similar edifices, the mausoleum of the Sempronii, and there was some feeling in my breast that rendered me unwilling to put any questions concerning it to Sabinus. As for Dromo, he, with the centurion's attendant, had fallen considerably behind us : and on the whole, indeed, I am not quite certain whether my curiosity was not crossed and balanced by an equal measure of reluctance. As it was, I rode on in silence, and my companion (although during the day he had talked, if not laughed, as much as usual) seemed to be as quietly disposed as myself.

But while we were moving onward thus slowly and silently, we heard of a sudden a clang of cymbals among the trees, a little to the right-hand ; and the centurion, saying, "What procession can this be?" led the way down a narrow path branching from the main road, which appeared to conduct towards the place from which the sound proceeded. This path was winding and dusky, being edged on either side with pines and cypresses, so that for some space we saw nothing ; and the cymbals having ceased again, the centurion said, "I suppose it is some funeral ; they have probably completed every thing, and have seen out the last gleam among the embers. Let us get on, for perhaps we may be kept back by their procession, if they are already returning."

We quickened our pace accordingly, and held on till at length a sharp turning of the road discovered to us a great number of persons who were standing quite silent, as if in contemplation of some ceremony or other spectacle ; but what it was, owing to the sinking of the ground beyond,

and the intervention of such a crowd of people, we could not see. Several persons on horseback seemed, like ourselves, to have had their progress interrupted; but they were sitting quietly, and making no complaint. The silence of the whole assembly was indeed such that Sabinus motioned to me to ask no questions, adding, in a low whisper, "Take off your riding-cap; it is some religious rite, and you see everybody is uncovered."

The centurion himself, however, was not a person to be stopped thus, without wishing to understand something further of the cause of the interruption; so ere long he began to manifest considerable symptoms of fretfulness. The one side of the road was guarded by a high wall, to the top of which a number of the more juvenile spectators had climbed; the other by a ditch of great breadth, and full of water, beyond which was a grove of trees; and I saw him eying the ditch, as if considering whether, by passing it, it might not be possible, without disturbing the crowd, to get nearer the object of their attention, or at least to make progress in our journey. At last he beckoned to me to follow him, and the bold equestrian at one leap easily passed over the ditch, and all the reeds that bordered it. I imitated the example, and so did the Prætorian soldier, who had now come up to us: but as for Dromo, he was obliged to remain (patiently or impatiently) behind; for, of a truth, the animal he bestrode was in nowise calculated for such feats.

We rode very quickly, therefore, along the margin of the trees, and ere we had reached the bottom of the declivity on which they grew, I perceived plainly that we had come close to the Sempronian monument, and that the ceremony, whatever it might be, was taking place immediately in front of the old tower upon the road. We gave our horses to the soldier, and contrived with some difficulty to gain the bank on the side of the way immediately over-against it—the same place, in fact, where the Cretan slave had taken his station among the pine-trees, on the night when all those things occurred of which I have already spoken to you. Like him, we placed ourselves as quietly as we could behind the trunks of the trees, and indeed, for our purpose, there could have been

no better situation. We were contented, however, to occupy it as much as possible without attracting observation; for it was evident, in spite of the curiosity that detained so great a multitude near at hand, there must be something mysterious or ominous of nature in that which was taking place, since not one of the crowd had dared to come forward so as to be within hearing of the officiators.

And these, indeed, were a very melancholy looking group. For men, and women, and children of every age, to the number it may be of a hundred, appeared all standing together sorrowfully, and in garments of black; while, in the midst of them, and immediately by the base of the monument, two or three veiled priests, with their necessary assistants, seemed to be preparing for sacrifice a strong black bull, whose hoofs spurned the dust as they held him, and his gilded horns glittered in the light of the declining sun. Sabinus no sooner discovered the arrangement of the solemn company than he suspected what was their occupation; and he whispered to me, while as yet all was silent, "Be sure these are all the kindred of the Sempronii. Without question they have come to purify the mausoleum, and to avert, according to the custom of antiquity, the vengeance of the violated Manes. Behold," said he, "that tall and stately figure, close to the head of the animal on the right-hand; that, I know, is Marcia—yes, Marcia Sempronia—she that is priestess of Apollo the Palatine. Without doubt, these by her are her brothers."

"Some of her near relations they must be," I made answer, also in a whisper; "for observe you that young woman, whose face is wrapped in her mourning veil, and whose sobs are audible even through all its folds? I had one glimpse of her countenance this moment, and I am sure it is the young Sempronia, the cousin and companion of the unfortunate Athanasia,—the daughter of Lucius the senator."

"Poor girl!" replied Sabinus, "from my heart do I pity her. See how she is in agony from thinking of that which hath befallen her friend. They are all joining hands, that the nearest of the kindred touching the priest, his deed may appear manifestly to be the deed of all. The

priestess of Apollo takes hold of the left hand of him that wields the axe, and they are all hand in hand. She, poor soul, alas ! she is ill able to take any part in their service ; and they all appear sufficiently downcast."

At this moment, one of the officiators sounded a few mournful notes upon a trumpet, and its solitary echo thrilled the air. The priest who held the axe clave at one blow the forehead of the blindfold bull. The blood streamed, and wine streamed with it abundantly upon the base of the mausoleum ; and then, while we were yet gazing on the convulsions of the dying animal, the trumpet sounded a second time, and the whole company sang together, the sacrificing priest leading and directing them. Distinct above all, yet low and steadfast rather than loud, I heard the voice of the stately priestess of Apollo ; but as for poor Sempronia, her notes were broken, and her assistance feeble.

The shadows of the tower and of the pine-trees lay strongly upon them, and I thought there was something of a very strange contrast between the company and their chant on the one hand, and the beautiful sculptures, full of all the emblems of life and happiness, on the other, with which, according to the gay dreams of Grecian fancy, the walls of the funereal edifice itself had here and there been garnished. Fauns, and torch-bearing nymphs and children, crowned with garlands, and wreathed groups and fantastic dances, seemed to enliven almost to mockery the monumental marbles ; but one felt the real gloominess both of death and of superstition, in the attitudes and accents of the living worshippers. It was thus they sang :—

Ye Gods infernal ! hear us from the gloom
Of venerable depths, remote, unseen ;
Hear us, ye guardians of the stained tomb,
Majestic Pluto—and thou, Stygian queen,
On the dark bosom leaning of great Dis—
Thou reconciled Star of the Abyss.

Blood, not for you, unholy hands have poured,
Ye heard the shriek of your insulted shrine ;
Barbarian blasphemies and rites abhorr'd
Pollute the place that hath been long divine ;
Borne from its wounded breast, an atheist cry
Hath pierced the upper and the nether sky.

With blood of righteous sacrifice again
 The monumental stone your suppliants lave ;
 Behold the dark-brow'd bull—behold him slain !
 Accept, ye powers of the relenting grave,
 The sable current of that vital stream ;—
 And let the father's hope upon the children gleam.

And ye, that in the ever dusky glades
 Of Hades wandering (by Cocytus' shore),
 Ancestral spirits—melancholy shades—
 With us the trespass of the tomb deplore ;—
 Oh ! intercede—that terror and disgrace
 May not possess (as now) your resting-place.

What though the liquid serpent of the deep
 Between lie coiled in many a glittering ring ?
 Not unobserved of your pale eyes we weep,
 Nor to deaf ears this doleful chant we sing ;
 Strong is the voice of blood through night to go,—
 Through night and hell, and all the realms below.

Then hear us, kindred spirits—stately Sire
 And pensive Mother ! wheresoe'er ye glide ;
 If ever solemn pile and soaring fire
 In freedom sped you to the Stygian tide,—
 Have pity on your children : let the breath
 Of living sorrow melt the frozen ear of death.

For Hæc, that sprung like us from your high line,
 Hath mingled in the sacrifice of guilt,—
 Ye know that ar'ry star, her natal sign,
 To expiate whose curse this blood is spilt ;—
 If not suffices this atoning blood,
 Oh, steep the thought of her in Lethe's flood !

Beneath that current, lazy and serene,
 In whose unfathomable waters lie
 The slumbering forms of horrors that have been
 In Hades, and in Ocean, Earth, and Sky—
 With long forgotten curse and murder old
 Steep that lost daughter's errors manifold.

Once more for you a hallow'd flame there burns,
 Once more for you a hallow'd stream there flows ;
 Despise not our lustrations of your urns,
 Nor let unhoused Manes be our foes !
 Above the children of your lineage born
 Hover not, awful ghosts, in anger and in scorn.

These words were sung, as I have said, by the whole
 of this kindred there assembled together ; the first part of
 them distinctly, though not loudly, but the last verses in a

note so very low that no one, unless quite near (like ourselves) could possibly have comprehended any thing of their meaning. But as for the young Sempronia, when they came to that part of the chant in which reference was so particularly made to Athanasia, not only did her lips refuse to join in the words, but her agitation was such, that I thought the poor maiden would have screamed outright, had she not been controlled by the eye, and the hand also, of her aunt the priestess. Sobs, however, and low hysterical groans could not be stifled; and at last so great was her agony, that even the haughty priestess was compelled to give way to it.

"Bring water," said she; "dash ye water upon the foolish thing; methinks it seems almost as if she had partaken in the phrensy of her unhappy—"

And before she could finish the sentence, one or two of the females that were present did take hold of Sempronia, and began, seeing there was no water nearer at hand, to bear her slender form towards the small stream of which I have already spoken, and which flowed immediately behind the clump of pine-trees among which the centurion and I were standing.

She was quite passive in their hands; and they dragged her without resistance or difficulty to the place where we were standing; but they could not pass without seeing us: and no sooner did the eyes of Sempronia fall upon me than she burst, by one unexpected effort, from the arms of those who were sustaining her, and, ere I or any one could suspect what she was to do, there lay she at my feet, clinging with her arms around my knees, and looking up to me (astonished) with a face of such anguish as never before, nor I think since, did I see portrayed in any human lineaments. The tresses of her hair, which, in her struggle, had altogether unbound themselves, hung around her neck and lay upon her shoulders in dark masses, that, heaving with the heaving of her bosom, seemed of themselves to be instinct with the elements of life and agony. Her beautiful features were at one moment pale as ivory, and the next saw them darkened almost with the scarlet of disimprisoned blood,—and, "Oh, Valerius!" said she, in a voice as full of tremour as

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her complexion was of change, "oh, dear Valerius! they curse Athanasia! Where is my Athanasia? where have they taken her? imprisoned—devoted—where does she lie? Oh, tell me, that I may go to her! that I may go instantly to her—that I may go to comfort Athanasia!"

"Peace!" said, before I could answer, the priestess of Apollo; "peace! mad, wretched thing,—has infatuation blasted the whole of our line?" And so saying, she seized Sempronia by the arm, and compelled her to spring from her knees. But the maiden still clung by her hands to me, and continued, with looks and words of misery, to demand from me that knowledge which, alas! I would myself have given so much to possess. Sabinus, however, smote me on the shoulder, as if to make me recollect myself; and I had resolution enough not to betray the feelings with which I listened to Sempronia's frantic supplication.

"What is this, sir?" then said the priestess to me,— "what is it that you know of Athanasia? and why is it that you have presumed to witness the secret sacrifice of a noble race?—Speak,—or is there no meaning at all in this poor girl's phrensy? And yet, methinks I have seen you before, and that, too, if I mistake me not, was in the presence of—"

"It was," said I, hastily,— "it was indeed in the presence of Athanasia; but that circumstance, if you please to remember, was altogether accidental. I was with the Lady Rubellia when you found her in the temple of Apollo—"

"Yes," said she, "it was that same day when she refused to name the name of Phœbus in his own precincts! Ha! little did I imagine what thoughts were in her breast, else might we at least have been spared this open degradation. And yet you, methinks, saluted Athanasia—What is your name, sir?—Know you, in truth, whither the Lady Athanasia has been conveyed?"

"He was with her!—he was with her!" exclaimed Sempronia,— "he was with her in the tower when the soldiers came! Oh, Valerius! if ever you loved Athanasia, tell me where she is now,—into that dungeon have they cast my friend—my sister?"

"Ha!" quoth the priestess, "he was with her in the tower! Romans—kinsmen—Lucius—Marcus—hear ye this? I charge ye, seize upon this treacherous blasphemer!—It is he who has deceived Athanasia; and now must he come here to taint the smoke of our sacrifice, and pollute our prayers with his presence. Seize him!—Seize him!"—and she herself grasped my cloak as she spoke—"seize, I charge ye, this accursed Christian!"

But Sabinus, when he saw the priestess thus furious, stepped forward, and said to her kinsmen, who were standing in perplexity behind her, "Sirs, I beseech you be not ye also carried away with this madness. My friend here knows nothing of the Lady Athanasia, except that she was borne away by soldiers from the very place where we are standing. I myself witnessed it also, being here with the Prætorians. Valerius is no more a Christian than the lady who accuses him."

"I know not, sirs, how we are to understand all this," said one of the Sempronii, in a calm voice. "Is this young man the same Valerius who is living in the house of Julius Licinius?—Yet it must be he. I have been with Licinius this very day; and if this be he, whatever he may have known before, I am sure he knows nothing of where Athanasia is now,—and, sister, I am well assured he is no Christian."

"It is the same, sir," said Sabinus. "He is the same person of whom you spoke, and I am Sabinus, a centurion of the Prætorians."

"We have all heard of your name," said Sempronius, respectfully. "I perceive there is some mistake in all this matter. If it please you, let us walk aside, and understand each other."

So saying, he withdrew Sabinus to a little distance, and beckoned to me to accompany him, and I did so, the priestess having in her confusion lost her hold of my cloak; while young Sempronia, who had fallen on the ground, occupied the attention of the centurion, and the rest of those who were near her.

"Valerius," said the old man, when he perceived that we were out of hearing, "I crave you, in the first place, to forget all this trouble which has been occasioned to you"

by the violence of my daughter on the one hand, and of my sister on the other. They are women; and, for different reasons, the violence of both is excusable. I have been for a considerable part of this day with Licinius, and have heard from him enough to satisfy me how guiltlessly you yourself have been involved in this affair; and your speedy liberation from confinement is more than enough to confirm my belief of all that he said. Yet there is much which I do not understand—I pray you speak openly, and fear nothing—you have indeed nothing to fear. Was it in consequence of any private meeting with my niece—nay, I mean not to suspect you of any thing amiss—in one word, how was it that you happened to be taken into custody with that unhappy girl?”

“Sir,” I replied, “you are a noble Roman, and the near kinsman of Athanasia. You have a right to put these questions, and whatever reluctance I may have to overcome, I feel that I have no right to refuse an answer. I might easily say, and truly, that it was not in consequence of any connection between myself and Athanasia that I came into the situation of which you know the consequences already. And yet in saying so, I should not tell you the whole truth, which I do desire to tell you. Know, then, that I came to this place on that unfortunate night, not only without any expectation of seeing Athanasia, but for a purpose entirely unconnected with her.” And so I told Sempronius, plainly and distinctly, the story both of my unwilling entrance into the mausoleum, and of my forcible abduction from it. In short, I saw no reason to conceal any thing from the person who was most likely to be able to serve Athanasia, if any thing to serve her were possible. Finally, seeing how kindly he received this communication, I told him I had gathered from the lips of Sempronia, the moment before, that she considered me as the lover of Athanasia.

“What I have felt,” said I, “what I still feel, and I perhaps shall ever feel, in regard to her, is nothing. I have never spoken of love to Athanasia, and I have no reason to suspect her of having ever thought of me otherwise than as a common acquaintance, perhaps a friend.”

“It is well,” he said; “you speak honestly, and as be

comes a man of the Valerian blood. Be assured, that your candour shall do you no injury in my estimation. But as for poor Athanasia, I swear to you I cannot yet bring myself to believe that she hath in reality been privy to such things as have been discovered concerning these Christians."

"Discovered!" said I. "I pray you, what has been discovered concerning them? If you allude to any of the wild stories that are circulated about their religion, you may depend upon it, 'tis all mere madness to believe a word of it. I have read in their sacred books myself, and I swear to you, that so far as I have seen, nothing can be more simple, benign, humane, than the morality inculcated by their leader."

"Poh! poh!" he answered; "I was not thinking of their creed, which, for aught I know or care, may be sublime enough; for there was always a mysterious sort of philosophy current among those old Asiatic people. But I speak of the designs of these men; in one word I speak of their conspiracy."

"Conspiracy!" said I. "What? How? Against whom? I will pledge my life, no conspiracy was sheltered beneath yon tower that night. I swear to you, they are simple people, and were thinking of nothing but their worship."

"Worship!" quoth he, with a smile; "I promise you it will not be so easy to persuade me that Cotilius has suddenly become a man of so much piety, either to our gods or to the deities (if they have any) of the Christians. What, Cotilius! By Jove, Rome does not hold at this moment a more bold, daring, godless rascal. You may as soon try to make me believe that Capaneus himself came to Thebes with a hymn in his mouth. No, no—the sworn friend of Domitian will not easily gain credit for his new-sprung sanctity."

"Cotilius!" I answered. "That was the very name of the man who seized me, as I have told you."

"I should have guessed as much," quoth he. "Yes, I promise you, how little soever poor Athanasia might have known, secrets you may depend upon it they had; and

Cotilius was well aware at what peril they should be revealed."

"The late example of Thraso," said I, "must indeed have alarmed him."

"What," said he; "do you speak of the old fanatic Syrian who died t'other day, rather than join in the sacrifice of Jupiter? My good friend, you know little of Cotilius, if you think it was of danger by such means avertible that he stood in terror. No, no—had the worst of his fears been the necessity to worship all the deities between Ganges and Rhine, I assure you he would have slept more soundly on his pillow than I think he has done ever since the death of Domitian—the most grateful sacrifice, by-the-way, that I believe either Olympus or Tartarus has received for these many days."

"But surely," said I, "you do not believe, Sempronius, that Athanasia had any knowledge of the man's secret designs, if he had any. He may have used Christianity, or desired to use it, as a weapon against the state; but be certain, neither she nor Thraso, nor any of those really attached to their religion, had any notion of his purpose."

"It may be so, indeed," he answered,—“Heaven grant it may be so. I can indeed scarce imagine it to be otherwise. Christianity itself is a crime—a grievous crime; but were it possible to show that the poor girl had no other offence but her share in this fanaticism, means, methinks, might be contrived among us to move the clemency of Trajan. As for Cotilius, I will speak to you more at length of him anon. I will bid adieu to my sister, and take order about my daughter; and then, if it so please you, we shall walk together to the city.”

To this I agreed, but Sabinus, being apprehensive of appearing to come late home, rode on to the camp of the Prætorians. He whispered to me, however, that unless he were most necessarily detained, he should be ere long at the house of Licinius, in case he might be able to offer me any further assistance.

CHAPTER VII.

"To you," said the senator, as we went on, "who have so lately come from your island, the whole of this expiatory spectacle is probably quite new; but I am sure Sabinus could not have been aware what was its purpose, otherwise he would not have been guilty of so grievously offending the feelings of my sister, and some of the rest of my kindred, by remaining a witness of these most private rites. The priestess is indeed inconsolable, and her grief has set half her other passions in motion likewise. Athanasia was as dear to her as if she had been her daughter; so, in truth, she was to us all, ever since her own parents died. Well, if kind heart and noble understanding had been to stand vouchers for happiness, I should have said (father though I be myself) that Rome did not contain such a creature as my brother's orphan. But Cotilius, this knave Cotilius, has, I fear, blasted her hopes and ours."

"It occurs to me," said I, "and I should have mentioned it to you before, that there seemed to be no great understanding between this Cotilius and Athanasia. She was evidently displeased with many things he both said and did; and he, on his part, did not appear much to relish her interference."

"True," he continued, "you have already hinted as much; and I assure you, these are some of the circumstances in the whole case that tend most to excite my hopes concerning its termination. Great Heavens! what would Caius have said had he dreamt that his orphan girl was to be suspected of having sympathy with any of the dark designs of that shame to Roman knighthood? But you, of course, are a stranger to every thing of this man's history."

"With its end, at least," I replied, "it is like we may all be soon enough acquainted."

"Yes," quoth he, "Heaven grant we have not cause too deeply to remember it; but as for me, I have known him from the beginning, and I swear to you that from the first day I saw him, I considered his face as something ominous to look upon. Jove avert that I should prove in this to have been a keen-eyed augur. I have told you already that he was in great favour with Domitian."

"And the reverse, of course," said I, "both with Nerva and Trajan."

"Even so," he continued, "and with all reason; for you must know, that in all the disturbances which occurred on the accession of the last sovereign, and in particular in those most foul intrigues among the Prætorians, which at one time brought Nerva's own life into immediate danger, and compelled him to bare his neck to the swords of the soldiery at his palace gate, this Cotilius was more than suspected to have had a deep and most traitorous concern. When Petronius and Parthenius* were hacked in pieces, it needed no great witchcraft to detect some of the moving spirits who produced that catastrophe; but proof there was none at the time, and even had there been proof enough the good old man would have been too timid to act upon it. These things, however, could not be forgotten either by Nerva or his successor. Hitherto the strong hand of the present emperor has repressed every rebellious motion; but be sure that no man ever lived more an object of suspicion than this man has done ever since Nerva adopted Trajan."

"And you think," said I, "that among other intrigues, it had occurred to this man to make his own use of the Christians? despised and persecuted though they be, there can, indeed, be no doubt that their numbers are considerable, and that their faith is a strong bond of cohesion."

"Yes, yes, Valerius," replied the senator. "Now, at last, I think you begin to see something of the matter. Their numbers, Heaven knows how or why, multiply daily, in

* These were the principal conspirators by whom Domitian was slain. They were afterward butchered by the Prætorians, who regretted the tyrant; and it was supposed to be chiefly in consequence of that slaughter, and its shameful consequences to himself (for he was compelled, among other insults, to return public thanks to the butchers), that Nerva led to his aid the personal vigour and high military genius of Trajan.

spite of all the evils to which the least suspicion may subject them. Their faith, be it what it may, must indeed be admitted to contain abundant elements of power ; and, to tell you the truth, my only wonder is, that long ere now some bold designer has not taken, or attempted to take, advantage of the means presented by its formidable though untried energies. But still we must not forget, that so far as the rest are concerned, all this is mere conjecture. As yet the treason even of Cotilius rests on suspicion only, and report—with perhaps some aid from the scarcely less credible confession of a few hirelings ; and, after all, even if he were proved guilty of having nourished such schemes, the account you give of what you both saw and heard at their assembly inspires me with very considerable doubts whether he can be supposed to have ever as yet ventured to invite their participation :—unless, indeed, we are to imagine that they practised deception while you were with them.”

“As yet, then,” said I, “neither Cotilius nor any of the others have confessed any thing?”

“Nay,” replied he ; “all I can answer for is, that a few hours ago nothing had been confessed. What has passed in the interim, it is impossible for me to conjecture. The moment I heard of what had happened—and I even to hear of it might have been denied for a long time but for a female slave of Capito’s, who had been in the custom of attending upon Athanasia—I went to the Palatine, in hopes of attaining either assistance from Urbicus, or mercy, if that were all we could look for, from Trajan. But Urbicus told me very distinctly, that as yet he could give me no satisfaction except that of knowing that my niece was in a solitary and perfectly safe place of confinement. The charges, he said, against one of the leaders (he meant Cotilius) were great and heavy, and until these were sifted to the bottom, it was impossible that any access could be afforded to the person of any one of those who had been thrown into confinement. The emperor, he added, had himself shown symptoms of anxiety, much beyond what are usual with him on any similar occasion ; and had even, so he hinted, been in person investigating the matter at a distance from the city, during great part of the preceding night and day.

"To tell you the truth, Valerius, till this thing fell out, I was wont to consider the new violence about the Christians as somewhat unworthy of the enlarged and liberal intellect of Trajan; but it had not occurred to me, how easily the resources of such a superstition might be enlisted in the cause of discontent, if not of treason."

"And what," said I, "may now be, according to your views, the most probable course of procedure concerning the prisoners?"

"I know not," he replied; "nor, by Hercules! do I believe there is a man in Rome beyond the palace-gate who would venture more than myself to form guesses upon such a subject. No, sir, I promise you, secrecy is now the order of the day; and this Urbicus, and all the rest of them that are immediately about the prince, have learned to wear faces of such more than human wisdom that I confess I am sick when I look upon them. At times almost could I sympathize with the unreflecting vulgar, who regret (even now) the careless swagger of the discarded freedmen—but no, that thought is unworthy of a man and a Roman. Far be it from me to arraign the well-tryed prudence of the generous Trajan. I trust in Jove, our poor girl may be guiltless of this (if guilt, such as I have talked of, there be), and then I have no doubt her burden may be lightened. As for the weakness of mere superstition, I believe the prince is as free from it as any man of education in Rome. He has, indeed, been greatly alarmed about these Christians; but he is not acquainted with the east so well as his father was. He is at home in Gaul and Germany; but I think it likely enough he may have been somewhat deceived about any thing of Syrian origin, such as this superstition."

"Of course," said I, "nothing will be done in regard to Athanasia until all circumstances have been examined."

"Done!" said he; "so help me Phœbus Apollo, has not enough been done already to justify almost in a man more than you have seen among our women? Has not a whole family been disgraced? Has not the mausoleum of their fathers been prostituted for the mad, if not blasphemous, purposes of this barbarian sect? And has not all this been done through the silliness of a single girl? By Jove! here is matter enough to alarm the least su-

perstitious of us all. If the senate should be summoned, with what countenance should I show myself among my friends? Mad, foolish girl! How little did she know in what trouble she was to involve those who love her the best."

"Alas! Sempronius," said I, "think what a weight of suffering must have fallen upon herself alone—helpless—hopeless. I wish to heaven it were possible to learn where she is."

"Impossible," said he; "but why should I be thus tormenting you with my own griefs? I perceive, Valerius, that you indeed are more to be pitied than any of us. Well, come what may, I shall never be able to think unkindly of poor Athanasia. No, no; when women err, men are ever to blame: depend upon it, we shall find some cunning Cotilius or other has been at the bottom of the whole."

By this time we had come within sight of the house of Licinius, and the senator prepared to accompany me thither; "for," said he, "his head is cool, and that is more, I think, than any one would say either for you or for myself."

On entering the house we were informed that Licinius himself had supped abroad, and was not yet returned; and the freedman who told us so added, that his master appeared to be much engaged, and had gone out in company with some friends, who, he thought, were likely to detain him till a late hour. "In that case," the senator whispered to me, "I have no doubt he is occupied with the same affair as ourselves. I doubt not he will let me know if he has any thing to communicate. In the mean time, I must go to my brother's house, and in the morning we shall all of us probably be better able to speak further together with advantage." So saying, Sempronius departed, and I was left at liberty to inquire concerning Sextus.

I found my friend alone in his chamber, where he embraced me with all the ardour of juvenile affection. "Alas!" said he, "my dear Valerius, at any other time I might have found fault with you for taking so great a part in my griefs, and yet keeping so many of your own to yourself. But if it be indeed as Sempronia has said,

should be a strange friend to choose this hour for complaining of such trifles as regard only myself ; my only concern is for you and for Athanasia. Speak, has no intelligence been yet obtained of her place of confinement, and is there no prospect of her also being restored to her liberty ? My heart bleeds for you, Valerius, for I see from your countenance that the truth has been told us."

"Sextus," I replied, "it was only because of the greatness of your own distresses that I concealed from your kindness any of mine. But when did you see Sempronia, and what did she tell you ?"

"My Valerius," he answered, "I shall tell you every thing to-morrow ; at present, I have only time to say, that the misfortune of Athanasia was communicated to Sempronia almost immediately by an old freedwoman, who had been in the habit of attending her when she went from home in secret, and who, going to the mausoleum to accompany her on her return, arrived there just in time to see what befell her. She saw you also (how she knew who you were I know not), and when she had told her story to Sempronia, the poor girl, before speaking even with her father, sent for me to come to her in the gardens. I did so ; all that passed I need not repeat ; but I hope my advice was the right one. At all events, I acted for the best, and my father, who is now aware of every thing, seemed to approve of what I had done. Oh ! Valerius, were Athanasia free, and you happy, many things have occurred to make me much more at ease than when you left us. My father is evidently much shocked with what Dromo told about Rubellia ; and as for Xerophrastes, he had not once spoken to him either yesterday or to-day. Indeed, neither of them have been much here. My father is continually exerting himself concerning Athanasia ; and Xerophrastes, I suppose, being conscious of the baseness of what he has done, is afraid of a discovery."

"Without doubt," I replied, "the solemn hypocrite has many fears. Even from what Dromo overheard of his conversation with Rubellia, one might gather as much."

"True," he replied ; "and his fears are all for himself. But, in the mean time, I take no notice of any thing

when I see him. It is of my father he is afraid, and when all things are discovered clearly, I promise you, I believe we may leave him very safely in his hands."

"In the mean time," said I, "your father is from home, and not expected to return very soon. I pray you, where is he?"

"That I know not," quoth he; "but I doubt not he is at the palace, or with some of the magistrates, assisting in the investigation of this conspiracy. As for me, I am sorry I must leave you, for I promised to meet Sempronia; and although I have nothing to tell her, I cannot fail in my appointment. She must have returned before this time from the mausoleum, where an expiatory sacrifice was to be made at sunset."

Sabinus, by this time, having executed whatever things were necessary at the Prætorian camp, had hastened to me once more, according to his kind promise. His look was more full of concern than when he had left me; and no wonder, for he had been hearing from his brother-soldiers of the affair of Cotilius, and that probably with many exaggerations.

I told him that Licinius was not at home, and that I proposed, in the mean time, accompanying Sextus a part of the way towards the suburban of Capito. The centurion insisted on going along with us, saying that he could not think of returning to the camp without having spoken with Licinius.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE centurion, in virtue of his office, had free access to the gardens of Trajan; so he led us by both a more delightful and a nearer path towards the Salarean Gate.*

* Trajan's private villa, where he chiefly resided, was on the Hill of Gardens, now called the *Pincian*. It was divided into two parts, the *Villa Inferior* and the *Villa Superior*,—these being connected by bridges.

Young Sextus then left us by ourselves, and we returned slowly through the beautiful groves of the imperial villa, in hopes of finding my kinsman by the time we should reach his mansion. But as we were walking very quietly along one of the broad green terraces, we heard voices in an adjoining alley, separated from us by luxuriant thickets of myrtle ; and Sabinus, whispering to me, "Hush, let us see what we have got here," insinuated himself with great dexterity among the verdant shrubs. I followed him with as little noise as was possible, and having found a convenient peeping-place, we soon perceived two figures, a man and a woman, walking side by side, apparently in earnest conversation, at some little distance from us in the moonlight.

"Come, Sabinus," I whispered, "it is some couple of lovers, perhaps ; I don't see what right we have to overhear their tender discourse."

"Peace, peace," quoth he, "if you stir they will detect us, and it is nothing unless it be known."

With some reluctance, I remained where I was ; but my scruples were at an end the moment I perceived who they were.

"Most noble, most illustrious lady," said one, who could be nobody but Xerophrastes, "this matter has indeed been conducted unfortunately, yet no reason see I why you should give way to so many groundless apprehensions. The only thing, after all, that you have lost, if indeed you have lost it, is the good opinion of Licinius ; for, as to that foolish boy—"

"Name him not, name him not," replied the Lady Rubellia, in a voice of much agitation ; "name not the silly stripling. Surely madness only can account for my behaviour."

"Madness !" quoth the stoic ; "yes, truly ; and who at certain moments is free from such madness ? As Euripides has expressed it (I think in the *Medea*), Venus, if she come in wisdom, is the wisest ; if otherwise, the most phrensied of all influences. The greatest and the wisest have not been exempt from such visitations. Banish it from your heart, noble lady, or replace it by something more worthy of your discernment. There

is, I think, but one pair of eyes in Rome that could have been blind to such perfections."

"Oh, Xerophrastes!" said she, "speak not to me of perfections. Alas! I was born under a deceitful star—a star of apparent splendour and real misery."

"Noble lady," he replied, "I swear to you that what tincture of philosophy I have imbibed is unable to sustain my serenity, when I hear such words from your lips; you are surrounded by all that externals can muster. It is your part to compose your mind, and then how should it be possible for you to taste of unhappiness? Think no more of that foolish Sextus."

"Think of him!" said she; "I swear to you I think of him no more than if he did not exist;" and she burst into tears as she spoke.

The philosopher took her hand with an air of the deepest sympathy, and at the same time drew the end of his mantle over his face, as if to conceal the extent of his participation in her distresses.

"Noblest, loveliest Rubellia," said he (half-sobbing I think), "this would make a child of a man. I swear to you I forget myself in your griefs; and yet," he added, laying his brawny hand upon his bosom, "if any powers there be that take cognizance of the affairs of humanity, they know that your poor servant has sorrows of his own. Alas! lady, this is, after all, a miserable world. There is no rest but in the affections, and behold how they are harassed on every hand by the invidious accidents of life. Philosophy proclaims her antidote, but the poison is everywhere; and it is all one course of being wounded to be cured, and being cured only to be more easily wounded again. I thought I had overcome all this, but alas!" (he sobbed audibly), "I feel that I am but a man, and that all is to begin again."

"Xerophrastes," interrupted the lady, composing herself, "must I in my turn become the comforter?" And so saying, she led the philosopher to a marble seat that was just opposite to us.

"Oh, Cithæron!" he proceeded, sitting down by her side, and yet as if not conscious of her interruption, "oh, ancient Cithæron! me fancy bears to the tranquil-

lity of thy shady groves—or to Tempe and the green recesses of her ever nemorous and gelid vales! Oh, cities! wo be to him who first invented the conglomeration of edifices, and the wide sweep of nature-violating walls!—Why did I, foolish and headstrong, abandon native felicity for the game in which so much must be lost, and so little can be gained? Unhappy day that I first saw yellow Tiber winding among the stately prison-houses of Rome!”

“Prison-houses!” quoth the lady, “what is your meaning?”

The philosopher made no answer for a moment, but continued sitting by the lady in an attitude of the most pensive contemplation. The moonbeams fell full on his high brow and the large massy features of his countenance, and on the robust limbs which emerged from below the stately folds of his mantle; and I could not help thinking that there was something almost heroic, which I had never before remarked, in the whole of his appearance. Rubellia kept her eyes fixed steadfastly upon him, with an expression which I half thought had something in it of admiration. At last, she repeated her interrogation.

He started, as if from the profoundest musing, and said, “Oh, pardon my abstraction! Surely I am not used to behave thus foolishly;—I talked of prisons; and what other name should be more fitting for the dwelling of those who are not free?”

“The sway of Trajan,” said Rubellia, “can scarcely be talked of so harshly.”

“I speak not of Trajan,” quoth he, very gravely; “I speak of the evil sway of custom, and the foul coercion of opinion, compared to which kingly or Cesarean despotism is less than flax to brazen fetters.—Rome! imperial Rome! is one mighty prison! and her noblest spirits are enslaved!”

“I understand you not,” quoth she, gazing earnestly upon his averted face.

“I should have known nothing of it,” replied he, “had I never deserted my paternal valley for the vain pleasures of Athens, and the magnificence of Rome.”

"You repent," said she, "that you ever visited Italy?"

"And if I leave Italy," quoth he, "who, I pray you, will regret my departure? Licinius is enraged with me, I can scarcely bear to look in his face,—and if he throws me off, where shall I bury my griefs, of which his desertion is the least?"

"You talk of this orator," she replied, in a haughty tone, "you talk of this most eloquent Licinius as if he were as great a man all the world over as he is in his little corner of the Forum. If you have offended him, it was in my service,—and think ye I am not able to make up for all of which Licinius can deprive you?—Speak—command me—say what I can do for you, and it shall be done."

Hereupon the manly breast of the philosopher was distended with a heavy sigh; having given vent to which, he laid his hand upon his forehead, but no winged word escaped the barrier of his lips.

"By Jove!" whispered Sabinus, scarcely able to contain himself, "by Jove, he has it!—'tis the most stoical malady of the heart."

"Xerophrastes," resumed the lady, "I pray you deal with me openly. If it be your wish to leave Rome, speak, and I shall put it in your power to retire to Greece as handsomely as you could ever have hoped to do from the family of Licinius. Of wealth, as you well know, I have enough both for myself and for my faithful friends, among whom, be sure, I place you in the first rank. Control your feelings, I pray you once more, and speak freely."

The philosopher lifted his hand from his face, looked upon the lady with eyes that glistened, or seemed to glisten, with emotion, and then clasped his brows again, as if wanting words or courage to express his wishes or his feelings. She, in the mean time, continued to regard the melancholy man with an aspect of so much anxiety, that—why should I deny it!—I half-suspected her of sharing the suspicion of Sabinus. After a pause of some moments, during which both preserved the same attitudes, Xerophrastes at last seemed in some measure to recover himself, and once more uncovered his eyes, which, however, he lifted not from the ground. The lady

laid her delicate fingers upon the strong hand which rested upon the knee of the stoic, and urged him, apparently in a tone of yet greater kindness than before, to make her the confidant of his griefs. It was then that the native boldness of the Thracian seemed to overcome the timidity of the dependant and the rhetorician. Hastily and fervently he pressed his lip upon the beautiful hand of Rubellia, and whispered something into her ear. She started, and I think blushed in the moonlight; but neither seemed offended very deeply with what he had said, nor with the gesture he had used.

"Softly, softly," whispered again the centurion, very bitterly; "be not ashamed, fair lady, of the love of thy servant."*

But (whether the echo of our whispers had reached her ear or not, I cannot tell) scarcely had these words been uttered, ere Rubellia started from her seat, and began to move pretty quickly down the shaded alley, as if towards the entrance of the gardens. Xerophrastes sat still for a moment, even after the lady had arisen, covering his eyes and part of his broad forehead with his hands, as if buried in his own thoughts too deeply to be with ease affected with a sense of things passing around him. Then, at last, he arose, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, walked after the noble dame, taking heed, however (it did not escape our observation), to arrange, as he rapidly followed her, the massive folds of his mantle into a graceful drapery. We very soon lost sight of them among the drooping boughs of the sycamores and old lime-trees, and the sound of their retreating footsteps died away upon the surface of the smooth green turf.

Sabinus with difficulty restrained himself till they were beyond the reach of his voice; but he then made himself ample amends by the violence of the laughter in which he began to indulge. "Ha!" said he, "is this to be the end of it? Most pensive ghost of Leberinus, is this to be thy successor?"

"Good heavens!" said I, "Sabinus, do you think it possible she should make the pedagogue her husband—she

* Ne sit ancilla libi amor pudori.—HON.

who was but yesterday so desperately enamoured of the beautiful young Sextus?"

"My dear islander," quoth the centurion, "do you remember the story of a certain beautiful boy, called Adonis?"

"To be sure," said I, "who is ignorant of the story of Adonis, or of the beautiful verses of Bion—

'I weep for fair Adonis—for Adonis is no more,
Dead is the fair Adonis—his beauty I deplore;
His white thigh with a tusk of white, the greenwood monster tore,
And now I weep Adonis,—for Adonis is no more.'"^{*}

"Well spouted, by my faith," quoth the soldier, "and with an excellent gravity, and most dolorous cadences. But think you Venus never altered the burden of her ditty? Have you never heard of Mars the blood-stained, the destroyer of men, the leveller of city-walls—nor of Anchises, the Dardan shepherd, wiser in his generation than one who inherited both his station and his opportunity—no, nor even of Vulcan, the cunning artificer, the lord of the one-eyed hammerers, the Lemnian, the chain-maker, the detector, the awkward cup-bearer, whose ministration, as honest Homer confesses, fills Olympus with inextinguishable laughter,—have you heard of all these, and I take it of a few more besides, and yet do you talk as if Venus, after the white boar's tusk had pierced the white thigh of her Adonis, had made no use of her beautiful girdle, but to wipe the tears from her pretty eyes withal?—her girdle, of which, heaven pity your memory, I know not how many blessed ages after Adonis had fallen, the same faithful bard said,

'In it is stored whate'er can love inspire—
In it is tender passion—warm desire—
Fond lover's soft and amorous intercourse—
The endearing looks and accents that can fire
The soul with passionate love's resistless force—
—'Gainst which the wisest find in wisdom no resource.'"[†]

Why, man, there seems every reason to think, that so far from thinking of him longer than any one else did, she

^{*} Elegy I.

[†] Iliad, 14.

was the very first to forget him. For, to this day, the girls both in Greece and Egypt put ashes on their hair one day in the twelvemonth, and I have seen them myself setting open coffins at their doors, in commemoration of Adonis; but I never heard that Venus is less sportive that doleful night than any other in the year. No, my most innocent and unsuspecting Briton, although Sextus has hunted in woods hated by Rubellia, and although the quarry has for ever deprived her of him, be you nothing afraid lest grief be her poison. By the arrow of Cupid, I see no reason why our Thracian should not play the part of an Anchises, as well as any shepherd that ever trod the soil of Ida. Why, he looked so well in the moonlight, that, were this Latmos, I would advise Rubellia not to let Dian herself see too much of him."

"To be sure," I answered, "the externals of the philosopher are much altered for the better."

"You mean his dress," quoth the centurion; "but I don't think that matters much. No, no, give the man his due, he may be neither Athenian nor philosopher; but, by Jove, he has as trim a leg as ever a lady's eye need desire to look upon."

While uttering these last words, Sabinus drew up the skirts of his sagum, and was manifestly observing, not with displeasure, the nervous outlines of his own nether limbs.

"Why, Xerophrastes is well enough," said I, "but yet his legs want that decided compact air which I chiefly admire—"

"That firm, soldier-like, brazen rigidity," interrupted the centurion, still looking downward.

"That beautiful elasticity of the well-strung shank," said I.

"That fine, sharp cut, carrying the calf into the ankle," quoth he.

"That indescribable something," said I.

"By Jove," quoth the centurion, "these sandals of mine have been but three times buckled, and yet see you how they are beginning to give way! I must change this fellow—I must certainly change him."

"Ha! ha! my dear Sabinus," said I, no longer able to contain myself; "I am sure you will at least never wish change the legs on which they are tied."

"You jackanapes," quoth he, "I believe the boy has been quizzing me this half-hour."

"Not a bit," said I, "not a bit, my dear Sabinus; I was only thinking, that if Rubellia wished to choose a husband by the shape of his legs, she might have shown better taste by looking elsewhere than on the stoic. He certainly is not to be compared, as to that point, with some men I have seen."

"I don't deny," replied the good-humoured man (easily pacified), "that Xerophrastes tends a little, a very little towards the clumsy. But perhaps the widow may not disapprove of that defect. Variety is certainly agreeable in most matters, and if she wished to find a pair of legs as different as possible from those of Leberinus, I must confess the stoic was just the man for her. Poor, good Leberinus!" continued he, again looking downwards, "I am sure your leg never stretched your sandal; I doubt if your widest latchet would have gone twice round the great toe of your successor, since such he is to be."

"After all," said I, "let her faults be what they may, do you not think it is a great shame, that a lady of her rank and fortune should throw every thing away upon such a great clumsy thick-legged ploughman as this—such a huge Thracian mountaineer—such a gluttonous porker?"

The centurion whistled.

"She," I continued, "who might perhaps have intermarried with one of the first characters of Rome."

The centurion whistled a still louder note; and with that we found ourselves once more close by the gate of the imperial gardens. A carriage was just driving off as we opened the postern. Sabinus ceased from whistling till it passed us,—muttered between his teeth, "By Jove! the fellow's ankles are as clumsy as door-posts,"—and then fell a-whistling again more lustily than ever.

He whistled on so till the sound of the chariot-wheels had died away in the hum of the distant streets; and then starting as if from some very profound revery, indulged himself in one of his own most jovial peals of laughter. "And well," said he, "there is one thing I am resolved on, and that is, that I shall be present at their wedding. By Jove, I was there the night she espoused Leberinus, and

I pitied her very sincerely, when I saw the pretty creature lifted over the old man's threshold in her yellow veil, which I could not help thinking concealed more sighs, if not more blushes, than are usual on such occasions. But I promise you the glare of her new torches, and the echo of the trumpets that are shortly about to be sounded, shall affect me with very different emotions; and then as to the epithalamium! Why, such a subject might make any man a poet. I think I shall try my hand on one myself. I wish we were but in Alexandria, I should contrive to make it find its way into every newspaper in the city.*

"Malicious man," said I, "is it not enough for you to enjoy the joke yourself?"

"Myself!" he replied; "by Jove, you are much mistaken if you think I shan't share it with half Rome! Why every one knows Rubellia, and I think this affair will produce more mirth, if it really goes on so, than any thing that has happened since the mad days of Poppæa. Rubellia and Xerophrastes—Venus and Saturn; and yet why should I speak of Saturn—I am sure it will be *THE GOLDEN AGE* for the Thracian."

"And what will the ladies do?" said I.

"Laugh at her, to be sure," replied he, "and perhaps imitate her example as soon as they have an opportunity. By the power of Mars, they are all alike. It is but flattery and boldness; and there is no one need despair. They look on themselves as so many superior spirits, which it is our whole business to worship; and no doubt they have their time of it. But when once you have found the charm to move them, why they dare refuse you nothing. They may babble as they will; but they are as powerless as the poor shades were before Tiresias."

"You do not always use to speak or to think of them quite so contemptuously," said I. "I am sure you have yourself worshipped in good earnest ere now, and with-

* The *acta diurna* of Alexandria were proverbial for being filled with all manner of ribaldry and private slander. They were the favourite reading of Domitian. But there is no reason to think that the daily papers (I had almost said the daily press) of Rome ever ventured upon the same species of license.

out any thought of tyrannizing over the object of your adoration.

The centurion whistled again a shrill note, and replied, with great emphasis, "My dear Valerius, if you get Athanasia to yourself, as I hope, in spite of all these troubles, you yet shall (since you have set your heart upon it), take my advice, and carry her with you to Britain before she has lived one week among these Roman matrons. The moment a girl is married they consider her as one of themselves, and tell her every thing; and, by Jove, there is no good to be got from their lessons. Proud, haughty, and imperious, how fortunate it is that they are also vain, silly, luxurious,—and, above all, that they are the fools of flattery. That is the chain that can bind them to the earth, however they carry their heads in the clouds. We were talking of all the fine things that Homer has put into the girdle of Venus. Well, flattery fell to our share, and I think it is a fair equivalent for the whole bunch of them."

CHAPTER IX.

SUCH talk passed between myself and the somewhat irritated centurion, as we proceeded with slow steps down the descent from the gardens of Trajan, and on towards the vicinity of Licinius's house. But as we advanced into the more peopled region of the city, we found the streets full of crowds and clamour, insomuch that we had some difficulty in walking together, and that such quiet discourse as had occupied us could no longer be carried on. The evening was one of the most lovely I had ever seen, and the moon was shedding a soft and yellow light upon the lofty towers and trees, and upon all that long perspective of pillars and porticoes, with which those proud Roman streets were, for the most part, lined on either side. Yet many groups of citizens were seen running to and fro with torches in their hands; while many more were sta-

tionary in great and impenetrable crowds, which, although there was much noise of merriment, and many songs and shouts of laughter among them, had the air, as it seemed to us, of being detained in expectation of some show or spectacle, yet more attractive than their present sources of amusement.

And accordingly we had not jostled on much farther, ere there arose behind us a peal, apparently at a considerable distance, of what seemed to me to be martial music; which the multitude around no sooner heard, than their noise and acclamation became more violent than ever. Ever and anon, nevertheless, they hushed themselves for an instant, as if to ascertain the progress of those who sounded the instruments; and then the more near they seemed to have come towards them, the more jubilant again and triumphant was the renewal of their outcries. Sabinus expressed at first some little displeasure, in having our return impeded after this fashion, and began to look about him, in case any inferior or off-shooting street might furnish us an opportunity of making our escape from these vociferous multitudes. But ere the sound of the approaching music had once or twice reached his ear, he became satisfied that all this was quite in vain.

"By my faith," said he, "I believe it is some troop of the Galli—yes, yes—I cannot be mistaken—there is the cymbal—there again is the shrill echo of the Phrygian horn, which to me sounds always as if the breath could not come without agony through its twisted folds—and—ay—there can be no doubt about it now, there is the hoarse big drum, by which they design to set forth the roaring of Cybele's lions. Well, we shall be able to distinguish the squeak of the beardless priests themselves by-and-by. We must e'en be content, Valerius, and remain here till the torches pass us; for the deeper we might advance into the city to-night, you may be sure we should find ourselves only so much the worse. I think these fellows might satisfy themselves with their *Hilaria*."

"That, I believe," said I, "is their great feast at the vernal equinox, when they wash the lions and chariot of the goddess in Tiber."

"Yes," quoth he; "and I promise you it is a grand

sight after its fashion ; for they spare no expense, and they generally show lions such as the amphitheatre cannot exhibit once in ten years. The last time I was present, there were four tawny monsters yoked abreast to drag the great rumbling brazen chariot of the goddess ; but how grand soever the sight of them was, you may guess there remained not many to face it in the streets. Windows, however, balconies, and so forth—all were crowded ; and by Jove, to hear the growling of the noble brutes, as they scoured down the Sacred Way, with the huge wheels clattering behind them, and then the hallooing of the mad priests, whose command over them seemed to be wonderfully perfect—I don't think there is a single religious ceremony in Rome that is worthy of being named in the same day with it. The east, after all, is the true seat of horrors ; and indeed, they say, even the feast of Cybele is nothing at all here, compared to what it is in Ephesus, or Antioch, or Alexandria. But I have never had the good luck to witness it in any of these places. I wish the emperor would grant me the reversion of their cast-off lions ; for I believe they never use the same set twice. I think I could contrive to make a snug thing of it, with the assistance of our black-faced friend Aspar."

"And what," said I, "may be the nature of this procession which we are about to witness ? Shall we see the lions ?"

"No, no, these are never shown but once in the twelve-month, man, on the great chariot-day of which I was speaking. But the priests themselves are not satisfied with being exhibited quite so sparingly, and that is what I was complaining of. All through the summer these fellows are running about among the villages, with a brazen image of the goddess, and wherever they arrive, the poor people that hear the sound of their fearful horns and cymbals are fain to come and pay them contributions—which they call feeding the lions of Cybele. Without doubt, it is from one of these marches that they are now returning : and hear them ! By Jove, they do the thing well, beardless though they be ; I am sure you will confess 'tis the finest music of the sort you ever heard."

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"Indeed," said I, "'tis an awful music, and such as may well be imagined to have had its origin in hoary woods, and beside old dark rivers rushing through the wilderness."

"Atys, Atys," quoth the centurion; "ay, I thought it must needs be the song of Atys they were singing—mark, now, how the strain varies,—sinks, swells, and then sinks again. I will tell you what the meaning of this is. It is meant to set forth the flight of the poor creature over wood and wild hill, and down every yawning ravine, and then up the rocks, and away again over the moors; and all the way the roar of the lions and the clanging of the furious cymbals is pursuing him on the breeze. By Jove, if sounds were to drive a man mad, these certainly are the likeliest I ever heard."

The Galli meantime had advanced so near to us that even I, who had never listened to them before, could comprehend some of the words of the chant, to which all this accompaniment was applied; and, as the centurion had judged, the burden of all was indeed continual glorying over the disaster of Atys. I remembered the most mournful verses of Catullus concerning the same fable, and therefore could not help shuddering at hearing it made the subject of such different celebration. But as for the centurion, he, now that all was in our distinct hearing, was, I thought, chiefly taken up with the excellence of the music; or at least, if there was any deeper feeling in his mind, I could perceive no trace of it in the style wherein he raised his stout voice to swell the chorus of the advancing priests. They that stood near, hearing him do so, eagerly followed his example; so that now the clear notes of the priests of the goddess were contrasted, not only with the deep murmuring of their own music, but with recurring bursts of rough and manly melody, from all the great multitudes through which their march was to be.

At last they came quite close to us, and passed on dancing and singing around the image of the goddess, right before the place where we were standing. A path being opened for them by the crowd all along, they made no halt in their progress, but went on at the same

pace, some of them leaping high from the ground as they dashed their cymbals, and others dancing lowly while they blew the long Phrygian trumpets and crooked horns of brass. The image itself was seated in a brazen chariot, to which brazen lions also were fastened, the whole being borne on the shoulders of some of the assistants. Behind it came others, beating great hollow drums; and then again more, leaping, and dancing, and singing, like those who preceded it. They were all clad in long Asiatic vests, with lofty tiaras, and their countenances, as well as their voices, intimated sufficiently that they were ministers of the same order to which the hapless Atys had belonged. Yet nothing but enthusiasm and triumph could be discovered in their manner of singing that terrible chant; for I suppose it was all of the same strain with the part of it which was sung as they went by the centurion and myself.

“Now is he come unto the Phrygian sea—
Below him, on the waste and yellow shore,
The mighty billows everlastingly
Dash, like devouring monsters—dash and roar.

“He gazes wide for hope, but hope is none—
For, even like the beasts from whom he flies,
The maned billows seem for him to groan;
Madness is in their foam and in their cries.

“Fly, Atys, fly,
The car is nigh;
The haunted wood
O'erhangs the flood;
The heavy breeze
Is in the trees;
The fierce waves leap
Upon the steep:
Yet fly, mad Atys, fly, and hear
Her lions roaring nearer, and more near,
Fly, Atys, fly!

“Unto the forest wilt thou turn again?
Free paths and wide, mad Atys, wait thee there.
Fly where the oak-boughs droop upon the plain,
Fly where beneath the pines the earth lies bare.

“Plunge, Atys, plunge into the reverend gloom
Of the most ancient bearded wilderness;

No hope is there of shelter from thy doom,
Yet haste, young Atys, haste thee not the less.

"Fly, Atys, fly!
The car is nigh;
The solitude
Of the black wood
Hath coverts good,
Where many a brood
Of beast and fowl
May scream and howl.
But no dark lair
For thee is there,
No shelter kind
Thy feet shall find :—
Fly, Atys, fly, and in thine ear
Be still the lion-roar near, and more near.
Fly, Atys, fly !"

So singing, they had not advanced much beyond the spot where we were standing, ere they stopped of a sudden their hitherto rapid dance of progress, and, placing the chariot and image of Cybele between the pillars of one of the porticoes that run out into the street, began a more stationary and solemn species of saltation, in front of the sacred emblems. When they had finished this dance also, and the more stately and measured chant of supplication with which it was accompanied, the priests then turned to the multitude, and called upon all those who revered the Didymæan mysteries, and the awful powers of their goddess, to approach her image and offer their gifts. And immediately, when they had said so, the multitude that were beyond formed themselves into a close phalanx, quite across the street, and torches being conveyed into the hands of such as stood in the foremost rank, there was left forthwith in front of the image and of the priestly attendants an open space, brightly illuminated, for the convenience, as it seemed, of those who might come forward to carry their offerings to the foot of the statue. And, indeed, it appeared as if these were not likely to be few in number; for the way being quite blocked up by those torch-bearers, no one could hope to pass on easily without giving something, or to pass at all without being observed. Not a few chariots, therefore, and litters also, having been detained in consequence of the crowd upon the streets, the persons who were seated

in these vehicles seemed to be anxious, as soon as possible, to present their offerings, that so the path onward into the city might be cleared to them, by command of the priests. It was necessary, however, as it turned out, that each person in advancing to the chariot of Cybele should imitate the dancing motions practised by the Galli themselves; and this circumstance, as may well be imagined, was far from being the most acceptable part of the ceremony to some of those who had thus been detained. A few of the common sort, both men and women, advanced at once boldly into the open ring, and with great appearance of joy went through all the necessary gesticulations. But, at first, none of the more lordly tenants of the chariots and litters seemed to be able to prevail on themselves to follow the example.

At length, however, the impatience even of these dignified persons began to overcome their reluctance; one and another red-edged gown was seen to float in lofty undulations across the torch-lighted stage, and when a handful of coin was heard to ring upon the basin of the goddess, you may take for granted the priests half-cracked their cheeks in blowing horn and trumpet, and clattered upon their great tambarines at least as violently as if they had made prize of another Atys. But how did the centurion chuckle when he observed (for we by this time had squeezed very near to the statue), that one of the next chariots was no other than that of Rubellia herself, and perceived that she and the stoic were now about to pass onward like the rest, at the expense both of giving money to the lions of Cybele, and of exhibiting their agility before the eyes of all that multitude.

"Jove in heaven!" cried he, "I thought the garden scene was all in all; but this beats it to atoms! Behold how the sturdy Thracian tucks up his garment above his sinewy knee, and how, nodding to the blows of the tambarine, he already meditates within himself the appropriate convolutions of the dance. And the pretty widow! by the girdle of Venus, she also is pointing her trim toe, and, look ye! better and better, do you not see that she has given her veil to the stoic, that so she may perform the more expeditely?"

"I see it all," said I ; " but do speak lower, dear Sabinus ; for, be sure, they would neither of them poise themselves half so gracefully, if they thought we were observing them."

"Hush !" quoth he, turning his head another way ; " I suspect the stoic's eye has already caught us."

Hearing this, I should of course have looked, after the example of the centurion, in another direction ; but I know not if you have experienced what I have oftentimes done, that, as if under the influence of some serpentine fascination, one's eyes are in such situations extremely apt to rest themselves just on the object which most of all they should avoid. And so it was with me ; for, instead of looking away, I perversely directed my eyes right upon the philosopher, who was so near that he could not possibly mistake me, or dream of my mistaking him for any one but himself. And he also, perhaps fascinated like myself in the style of which I have been speaking, although it was too evident that the sight of me was extremely unwelcome, appeared, nevertheless, to be constrained to keep his optics fixed upon me,—insomuch that I could not refrain from saluting him, to which he replied by a very low bow, and an unfortunate attempt towards a smile of courtesy. The widow, who could not help seeing what passed between us, saluted me also, but with an air of considerable confusion, for the blood mounted into her face, and suffused, for a moment, with deep crimson both her neck and arms ; and altogether, it was manifest that our recognition of her in such a situation, and in such company, had affected her with much perturbation. The centurion, however, who had by this time turned round again, no sooner saw that the ice was broken, than in he plunged with a volley of dashing compliments—betraying in nothing either surprise, or any extraordinary species of feeling beyond what is common when acquaintances chance to fall in with each other fortuitously.

"All hail," said he, "fair lady ! and all hail, most reverend friend Xerophrastes ! What a beautiful moonlight evening this is ! Come, no shyness, old cock of Hymettus ! foot it away, foot it away, man ! The lady will never

have courage, if you don't give her your hand. Come, now, and remember, my good friend, that even although you be a stoic, you are an Athenian into the bargain. Come, polite sage, hop on, and convince us that philosophy has not quite washed out your original urbanity and elegance."

There was always so much good-nature in the manner of the worthy centurion, that it was almost impossible for any one to be offended even by his sarcasms. His broad ruddy face seemed made for the very habitation of smiles; his lips were ever wreathed with benignity, not to be mistaken; and the tones of his voice were so rich and easy that Thersites himself would not have dared to suspect them of malice. Yet Xerophrastes, on this occasion, appeared to be by no means delighted with the style of his salutation. A frown passed very darkly over his forehead, and he turned to the blushing lady with an air of the highest impatience. She, on her part, although she was probably far from deriving any pleasure from what had passed, had the wit to disguise, in some measure, the feelings of her mind. She cast, therefore, a smile of airy and good-humoured rebuke (such at least it was designed to be) upon the mirthful centurion, and said, "Come, Sabinus, methinks it might become you better to offer me your hand yourself for this sacred dance, than to play off your jokes so upon Xerophrastes, who cannot help himself any more than the rest of us. Come, centurion, I insist upon having your company."

"My dear lady," quoth the centurion, advancing close to Rubellia, "you well know that my services are always at your disposal; but it seems to me that you are already engaged for this dance; and I am sure you will break the heart of Xerophrastes if you disappoint him, now that he has tightened his girdle, and plucked up his mantle, and made so many preparations. No, no; the luck is his for this time, and don't let him be deprived of it. You see how conscientious I am, my dear stoic; no more words, I pray you. Lead forth your fair partner; and Valerius and I, since we can do no better, shall follow in your train."

Xerophrastes heard all this with a countenance but little

mollified. He turned, however, once more to the lady; and then forcing another smile, and gathering up the folds of his upper garment, no longer hesitated. She gave her hand therefore to the sage, and both, catching the beat of the instruments, forthwith sprung into the open place, and advanced with the usual motions towards the statue of the goddess. There was a good deal of constraint, it is not to be denied, in the manner of the lady; yet, on the whole, she acquitted herself in a style that bespoke her familiarity with all graceful exercises. But it was far otherwise with the stately disciple of the Porch, who, although he displayed brawny limbs, and abundance of agility after a fashion, yet executed every movement in a way so unequivocally rustic, that not a few of the youthful bystanders were not to be restrained from tittering, when they contemplated his clumsiness.

"Well done, well done!" quoth one.

"The rhetorician for ever!" cried another, clapping his hands.

"Take care, Master Philosopher," quoth a third; "your mantle is sweeping up all the dust."

Xerophrates, hearing this last ejaculation, could not help looking behind him to see as to the condition of his garments, and then the titter became universal; for the truth is, he had them drawn up very tightly, and indeed much higher than was at all necessary, even for the full exhibition of his limbs. With less than stoical equanimity did he regard the crowd of laughers behind him; and, of a truth, the last part of his dancing was yet more awkward than the first. The munificence of Rubellia, however, gained to her all the applauses of the sacred functionaries. The tiara'd heads were bowed in reverence before her; and she and her companion, after having deposited their contributions, were cheered out of the circle with a most cordial peal of drum, horn, and trumpet.

While this peal yet continued in all its vociferation, the jolly centurion touched me gayly on the elbow, and saying, "Now for it, Valerius; have you your sesterces ready?" leaped forth with a most warlike and determined air, having his hands stuck in his sides, and causing the folds of his sagum to vibrate in a wonderful manner, by the po-

tent exercitation of his well-strung muscles. The contrast between the reluctant clumsiness of the sulky philosopher and the ready and well-satisfied hilarity of his successor was by no means lost upon the multitude of spectators ; insomuch that the very first appearance of the new performer was greeted by a universal clapping of hands, and every other manifestation of delight. Instead of being offended by their mirth, the Prætorian distributed his smiles on every side ; and observing a buxom young woman in one corner, who seemed afraid to trust herself before so many eyes, he, without interrupting his step, took her gallantly by the hand, and so performed the rest of the dance in a manner which yet more increased the satisfaction of all who were looking on it. The girl had a few pence in her hand ; but the centurion would not permit her to pay any thing, laying down himself a double ransom, and saying, perhaps rather too audibly, " No, no, pretty maid ; you have given enough to the goddess, since she has beheld your blushes."

The maiden's blushes were probably not diminished by all this courtesy from a person of such figure ; but, however that might be, even the priests of Cybele were well pleased with the centurion, and I think that his good-humour procured for him a parting salute not much less violent than had been purchased by all the munificence of the widow. I know not what it was that all this while kept me back ; but I could not, at the moment when Sabinus began, gather confidence to begin along with him : and then his dancing attracted so much notice, that it would have been a sort of intrusion had any one ventured to occupy the space till he was done with it. I waited, therefore, in hopes of being able to go forth with some ordinary group of performers ; but no such opportunity immediately occurred.

One of the next that exhibited himself was a very red-nosed senator, whose gestures threw even those of Xerophraustes completely into the shade. He appeared to be labouring under the relics of a grievous gout ; for he had his feet wrapped round with I know not how many folds of linen, and whenever he essayed to spring from the ground, one would have thought he had trodden upon

some nest of aspics. His hands meanwhile were held far out from him, and clenched bitterly, and at every successive bound I could see him grinding his teeth for agony. Whether it had been so that the man was well known among them, I cannot say ; but if it were so, his character must certainly have been held in little favour by the multitude ; for to every sardonic grin of his, the faces round about him replied by showing all their teeth ; and one of the little boys, following close at his heels, was not withheld by any respect for the laticlave from imitating all the gestures both of his infirmity and of his ill-nature. I took it for granted that he must needs be some greedy and usurious old extortioner ; and, indeed, the offering he deposited neither sounded very loudly on the basin of the goddess, nor received any great marks of thankfulness from the music of the priests.

I was just about to follow this ancient, and rejoin my companion, when some one from behind laid hold of my arm, and I heard at the same moment a whisper of, "Valerius—stop, Valerius ; whither are you going ?" I looked round naturally to see who it was that thus addressed me, and I perceived that he was an old man, wrapped in a very large and deep mantle, the folds of which, however, were so arranged that I could see very little of his features. I could not for my life imagine who this could be ; but the man, stepping a pace or two backward, beckoned to me with his hand, and I, suspecting no evil, immediately followed him. Seeing me move towards him, he drew back yet farther, and ascended a few steps which conducted to the portico of the adjoining house. I hesitated for a moment ; but his inviting gesture being repeated, I also entered within the shade of the pillars, and then the old man, dropping his mantle on his shoulders, said, "Valerius, do you not remember me ? We met last at the tomb of the Sempronii."

"At the tomb of the Sempronii !" said I ; and gazing earnestly upon him, I recognised, indeed, the features of the Christian priest, who had treated me on that eventful evening with so much courtesy ; but my surprise was great, as you may believe, to find him in such a situation ; for I myself had seen him conveyed away between armed

guards, and I could not imagine by what means he, of all others, should have so soon regained his freedom.

He observed my astonishment, and gently smiling, said, in a low voice, "My dear friend, perhaps I might have as much reason to be surprised with seeing you here, as you have in seeing me. But follow me into this house, where, I assure you, you shall be both safe and welcome, and where we may communicate to each other whatever particulars have occurred."

The hope of perhaps hearing something concerning Athanasia determined me. I cast a look towards Sabinus, and saw him in the front row on the other side, attentively engaged in witnessing the performance. In short, I had no means of giving him any information, and hoping that he might continue to amuse himself so for a few minutes longer, I permitted the old man to lead me into the vestibule of the mansion. The slaves who were waiting there seemed to receive him with much respect; and he, on his part, had the air of being familiar with them. He passed them, saying, "Do not trouble yourselves, I shall rejoin your master," walked before me up stairs, and shortly ushered me into a chamber situated over the hall of entrance, where a grave and elderly personage was reclining close by the open window which looked out upon the crowded and noisy street. Our host perceived not our approach till we had come close up to his couch, for he was occupied with what was going on without, and the clamours of the Didymæan music might have easily drowned a noise much more obtrusive than that of our footsteps.

But when the old man accosted him, and said, "Pontius, I have been successful. Here is my friend, young Valerius," the stranger rose up, and saluted me with the greatest kindness.

"I fear Valerius will think he has done but indifferently in exchanging a scene of so much gayety for the conversation of two quiet old men; however, he will pardon me for being desirous of seeing him here, when he learns that I was one of his father's oldest friends, and served with him many campaigns, both in Germany and Britain. I should have been ill pleased had I heard that Valerius

had been in Rome, and had departed without my having an opportunity of retracing in him, as I now do, the image of my old comrade."

There was something so kindly in the manner in which these words were uttered, that I could not help being much gratified ; as, indeed, who is not gratified when he hears affectionate commemoration of a departed parent ? I answered, therefore, in terms correspondent to my feelings ; but I could not help being all the while exceedingly curious to know something of the connection between Pontius and the old Christian, and I think my curiosity was not so well disguised as to escape the notice of either of them. A wine-flask, however, stood upon the table, and I was constrained to pledge the old friend of my father in a cup of excellent Falernian, and to listen and reply to not a few questions concerning the situation of my mother and myself, before I could lead the conversation into the channel I desired ; and at length, indeed, it was not so much any thing I said, as the readiness of the old priest himself, which gave to it that direction ; for the very first pause that occurred in the discourse between Pontius and myself, he filled up, by saying, " And now will Valerius pardon me for asking, if he has ever looked again into the narrative of Luke, or whether his curiosity, in regard to these matters, has been entirely satisfied by the adventures of one unfortunate night ?"

The manner in which Pontius regarded me when the priest said this left me no doubt that he himself had embraced, or was at least favourably inclined to, the opinions of the Christians ; so I answered without hesitation, " My curiosity, instead of being satisfied with what I saw that evening, received new strength ; but you may easily believe that the troubles in which I was involved, and still more the troubles with which I know some others yet to be surrounded, have hitherto taken away from me both the means and the power of gratifying my curiosity as I would wish. But tell me, I pray you, by what means is your imprisonment at an end ?"

" My friend," replied the priest, " you speak naturally, but rashly. I believe you yourself are the only one of those surprised in the tower whose imprisonment has as yet terminated. Yet hope, good hope is not absent,—

above all, I trust there is no reason to despair concerning that dear child who interfered in your behalf, when a rash, a bold, and, I fear me, a false man had drawn his weapon to your peril. As for me, I have but gained the liberty of an hour or two, and long ere morning's dawn I shall be restored again to my fetters."

"Your fetters!" said I; "excuse me, but you speak in a manner which entirely perplexes me. Am I to understand, that by the connivance of a Roman jailer you are this night at liberty to perambulate the streets of Rome? Who is the man that has virtue enough to place so much reliance on your promise?"

"Young man," answered the priest, "he is a Christian."

"Even for his sake," said I, "the name is honourable."

The old man smiled when I said this, and then, as if correcting himself, looked very gravely upon me, and said, "Valerius, I pray you speak not things which may hereafter give pain to your memory. Already you have read something of the life of ONE for whose sake our name is indeed honourable—of Him I trust you shall ere long both read and think more; but in the mean time speak cautiously. I pray you, and remember, that where mercy is most abundant offence is most unworthy."

"Felix," interrupted Pontius, "you speak too seriously concerning an involuntary and unconscious error. Valerius meant only to express his admiration of the jailer's behaviour."

I nodded assent to this; and the old man, again smiling reverently after his fashion, went on, saying, "You must even pardon the jealousy of an old servant (however unworthy) for the honour of his Master. In truth, the man hath conducted himself both like a Roman and a Christian, and most surely his generosity shall draw no evil on his head. But how shall I bless God, who threw my lot, since captivity it was to be, into a place where such authority as this was to have the superintendence of me. Yet more, how shall I be sufficiently grateful, that SHE, in all things so delicate, although in nothing fearful, has shared the same blessing. In the worst, it is indeed true that there is an eye to regard the faithful, and an arm to sus-

tain them; but when I think what might have been—when I think that some brutal ruffian, and some gloomy dungeon, might have received my beautiful, my innocent child—”

“Heavens!” said I, “what do I hear!—Is Athanasia indeed lodged in the same prison with yourself, and is she also thus favoured?”

“I thank my God and hers,” replied the old man, “that it is even so. The rest of those that were taken with us have been dispersed I know not where; but ever since that time she and I have been under the roof of this our brother.”

“And may she also go abroad thus freely?”

“Valerius,” he replied, “you are much mistaken if you think that I embrace such freedom for my own sake, or for any purposes of mine own. What I do for the service to which I am bound, think not that Athanasia will ever desire to do for herself. She abides her time patiently where the lot hath been cast for her; in due season, if such be the will of the Lord, she shall regain that in truth of which this is but the shadow.”

“God grant our prayer,” said Pontius, “and not ours only, but the prayer of all who know her, and have heard of this calamity! I think,” he continued, turning to me, “I think my brother mentioned that he had met you, along with Athanasia, at the villa of her uncle.”

I bowed assent, and he proceeded.

“Whatever the exertions of her family and their friends can accomplish, most surely shall not be a-wanting. Would that those who are linked to her by ties yet more sacred had the power, as they have the will, to serve her! Yet hope must never be rejected. The lamp yet burns on, and who knows what the investigations of this very night may produce? The true accomplices of Cotilius must of necessity, I think, be discovered; and then Trajan will be satisfied that the Christians stand guiltless, at least of that treason. Let us wait patiently, and hope ever the best.”

“Alas!” said I, turning myself round to the priest, “what avails it to speak of hoping? If to follow this faith be a crime, how can any one hope to follow it with-

out being continually liable to accidents at least as unfortunate? In Rome, at all events, what madness is it thus to tempt the fate which impends over the discovery of that which it must be so difficult, so impossible to conceal? Why, supposing you to be at liberty once more, why do you not abandon the capital, and seek some retreat where privacy might be more attainable—where that might be done in safety which here cannot be without the continual presence, at least without the continual dread, of peril?”

The old man heard me speak all these things (which I did hurriedly and vehemently) with a countenance of the utmost gravity. When I stopped he said nothing, but laid his finger on his lips in token of silence, and pointed with his other hand to the open window by which we were sitting. I listened, and heard distinctly the shrill voices of the priests of Cybele, as they broke forth above the choral murmurs of the drums and cymbals, and I perceived that the bloody legend of Atys was once more the subject of their song. The old man held his finger steady on his lip, and I could comprehend the words of their strain quite as well as if I had been close to them upon the street.

But, as the dark rites of that Idæan superstition have never penetrated into our island, I cannot hope to give you any notion of the wild and gloomy impression which their mode of chanting such words as these is calculated to produce. You will understand, however, that the first part was always done slowly and solemnly, and that, in the latter, the voices of the priests ran rapidly and violently over the notes.

“Black—black and lazy rolls Eurymedon
(The great Pamphylian river) to the sea;
Full many a dusky shadow rests thereon,
From rock and old impending hoary tree.

“Upon the margin of the heavy stream,
With rustling oak-leaves scatter'd red and sear,
Stands the wan Phrygian boy, as in a dream,
Worn out and wasted with his wild career.

“Above him, like a pale and shivering sprite,
The Moon glides in the melancholy sky;
While ever and anon the winds of night,
Amid the bare bleak branches, groan and sigh.

"How long, mad Atya, wilt thou stand,
With fixed eye and folded hand;
Nor hear what terrors are behind
On the dreary mourning wind?
Mother, 'tis not the voice of that black river,
Rolling slow to ocean ever—
Mother, 'tis not the whisper of the breeze
To the gray brotherhood of trees.
On flows the wave, the night-blast swells and dies;
But vainly from thy car mad Atya flies!"

The ancient waited till the voices were drowned again in the clamour of the instruments, and then said to me, "Young man, do you know to what horrid story these words of theirs refer? Do you know what sounds all these are designed to imitate? Do you know what terror—what flight—what blood—what madness are here set forth in honour of a cruel demon—or rather, I should say, for the gain of these miserable and maimed hirelings? Do you know all these things, and yet give counsel of flight and of cowardice to me, upon whose head the hand of Christ's holy apostle hath been laid? Truly, it becometh well the appointed leaders to turn back and flee, when they perceive the glittering of the spears of the adversary, and hear the proud shouts of those who provoke them to the onset. Young man, for all her bonds, it is not by such words as these that Athanasia might be wrought upon; God, be sure, hath granted to her youth, tender though it be, such heart, and such confidence, as long, long years of trial have with difficulty conferred on others (less favoured) of his servants."

The moon, which fell full on the old man's countenance as he spoke so, showed his pale cheek suffused for the moment with a more than boyish blush, and his eyes sparkling not the less brightly because a tear hung translucent within its lids. He paused for a moment, and then, sinking his voice almost into a whisper, and folding his hands before him, he proceeded.

"Yes, my friend, it is even so; but Valerius may be excusable, although he as yet understands little of the feelings his words have perhaps too vehemently aroused. I trust it shall not long be so, and that, if indeed we shall ever be set free from this captivity, we shall have our

return to the fellowship of the faithful hailed by a new son and a new brother, not less dear than any from whom we have been separated. Read, my dear Valerius, read and ponder well: my prayers, and the prayers of one who is far purer than me—they are ever with you. But now, since I have introduced you to Pontius, why should I delay here any longer? He, both for your father's sake and for your own, and for that of the faith (of which you have had some glimpses), will abundantly aid you in all things. Deal not coldly nor distantly with him. I commit you into his hands, as a brand to be snatched from the burning."

Pontius, during the address, reached forth his hand and grasped mine firmly, as in token of his acquiescence in all the old man expressed. He, on his part, having made an end of what he designed to speak, arose, and, looking into the street, said, "These jugglers have now departed to their dens, and the gaping multitudes that attended them have dispersed. But I still see one person walking up and down, as if expecting somebody, where their dancing took place; and it seems to me that it is the same, Valerius, who was in your company when you walked hither." I looked, and perceived that it was indeed Sabinus; and I heard him whistling to himself, as he walked to and fro on the bright side of the pavement. I therefore bade them adieu hastily, saying that I had no thought my friend would have detained himself so long for me. As I was going out, however, I could not help saying to the old priest, "Dear father, when shall I see you again, and when shall I hear further of Athanasia?"

The old man paused for a moment, and then said, "To-morrow, to-morrow at noontide, be in the Roman Forum over-against the statue of Numa. You will there find some tidings for you."

"Surely," said I to myself, "this old man will not dare to walk at noonday in the Forum; but after what I have seen, what shall appear impossible?"

I then rejoined Sabinus, who took my arm without interrupting his whistle, and so we walked briskly towards the house of my kinsman. The centurion plainly intimated that he took it for granted I had been engaged in some-

thing which I wished to keep from his knowledge ; but such affairs made no great impression on him ; and after laughing out his laugh, he bade me farewell for the night, close by the portico of Licinius.

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning I found Licinius and his son extremely uneasy, in consequence of the absence of Xerophrates, who had not returned during the whole of the night ; but Sabinus came in while they were talking to me, and narrated, without hesitation, all we had seen and heard, both in the garden of Trajan and at the procession of the Galli. Young Sextus could scarcely be restrained by respect for his father from expressing, rather too openly, his satisfaction in the course which the affairs of the disappointed lady appeared to be taking ; while the orator himself muttered between his teeth words which I thought boded not much of good to the ambitious rhetorician. The centurion alone regarded all these things as matters of mere amusement, or so at least he seemed to regard them ; for, as I have already hinted, I was not without my suspicion that he was at bottom by no means well pleased with the contemplation of the future splendour of the stoic.

However, after many jests had been exchanged between Sextus and the centurion concerning this new-discovered and apparently very incongruous amour, Licinius said, he was in so far much relieved by what he had heard, as it satisfied him that both the widow and her lover were now otherwise occupied than in prosecuting their designs against the niece of his friend Capito.

"I myself," he continued, "was all yesterday, as well as the day before, exerting every means in my power for her extrication from this unfortunate confinement.

Volitius, without question, has indeed been a traitor ;

but I believe the prince himself is, by this time, well inclined to absolve, not only the young lady, but by far the greater part of those who were taken with her, from any participation in his traitorous and unworthy designs. The charge, however, of which it rests with themselves alone to exculpate themselves, is one of a nature so serious that it is impossible to contemplate, without much anxiety, the pain to which so many families—above all, the noble and excellent Sempronii—may still, it is but too probable, be exposed. But this day Cotilius will, in all likelihood, pay the last penalty of *his* crimes—and then we shall see what intercession may avail. Would to Heaven there were any one could obtain access to the deluded lady, and prevail with her to do that which would be more effectual than I can hope any intercession to prove.”

I shook my head, and Licinius understood well the meaning of the gesture. “My dear Valerius,” said he, “I am afraid your apprehensions are indeed far from being groundless. This infatuation—this dream—this madness—is, indeed, a just source of fear; and yet, why should we suppose its sway to be already so deeply confirmed in a breast so young, so ingenuous, so full, according to every report, of every thing modest, gentle, and submissive? Surely this amiable, affectionate girl cannot be insensible to the affliction of those who love her the best. But you still shake your head, Valerius; well, it is in our hands to do what we can; as for the issue, who can hope to divert Trajan from doing that which he believes to be just? Our best hope is in his justice—”

“And in his clemency,” interrupted the centurion;—“yes, yes, and in his clemency; you will scarcely persuade me that Cesar can meditate any thing serious concerning an innocent young girl, who has been guilty of nothing but a little superstition and enthusiasm. Nobody will confound her case with that of any obstinate old fanatic. Great Jove! it is not to be believed but that she shall have many happy days yet, to see the nonsense of all these Jewish visions, and to forget them. In the mean time, what avails it to distress ourselves

more than is necessary? Licinius is able to do something, and he will do whatever he can; and as for Valerius, it is my humble opinion that the best thing he can do is to get on horseback and go with Sextus and myself to the river-side, where the emperor is to review this morning the two cohorts that have just arrived from Calabria. They say they are in fine condition, and I have several old comrades among them, whom I have not seen for these three years."

Young Sextus, who was on all occasions very fond of military spectacles, embraced with gladness this proposal of the ever-active centurion; and very fain would they both have prevailed on me to accede to it likewise. I knew, however, that it would be impossible, if I accompanied them, to keep my appointment with the old Christian; and that I was resolved on no account to forego. I told them, therefore, that I must needs spend the morning in writing to my friends in Britain; and so retired to my chamber, there to await the approach of the hour at which I had made promise to be in the Forum. I spent the time till it drew near in perusing once more (which I now did with greater composure and reflection, but with no diminution either of interest or admiration) the volume which had been given to me by Thraso, and restored to me again by Athanasia. This volume, and the letter which I have before mentioned, I placed together in my bosom, before I went forth into the city.

I entered the Forum, and found it, as formerly, thronged with multitudes of busy litigants and idle spectators. A greater concourse, indeed, than was usual, crowded, not it only, but all the avenues to it, and all the neighbouring streets, by reason of a solemn embassy from the Parthian, which was to have audience of Trajan that day, in presence of the Senate. The rumour of this oriental pageant (for it was noised abroad that the ambassadors brought many splendid gifts in their train) had attracted the loungers of the baths and porticoes of the Palatine, and all were waiting for the moment when the prince should return from the Martians, with the newly arrived cohorts, and take his place

in the temple of Concord, where the Parthians were to be received. But I, for my part, had no sooner discovered the statue of Numa Pompilius than I resolved to abide close by it, lest, being mingled in the tumult of the expecting multitudes, I should, by any mischance, escape the notice of the old man, who, I doubted not, meant to seek me there in person. The time, however, went on—senator after senator entered the portico of the temple—and at last the shouts of the people announced that Trajan himself had arrived there. And immediately after he had gone in, the stately pomp of the Parthian embassy appeared in view, and every eye was fixed upon the long line of slaves, laden with cloth of gold and rich merchandise, and upon the beautiful troop of snow-white horses, which pawed the ground, in magnificent caparisons, before the gate of the Senate-house. But when the trumpets had blown a salute, which I understood to signify that the ambassadors themselves drew near, and all were yet more earnestly intent upon the spectacle, I observed a little fair-haired girl standing over-against me, by the base of the statue, who, after looking at me for some moments, came close to me, and said, with great modesty, “Sir, if you be Caius Valerius, I pray you follow me, and I shall bring you to the friend whom you have expected.”

I signified that I was the man she sought, and that I was prepared to attend her; and then the little girl cast her eyes upward on the left-hand, where the cliff and towers of the Capitol overlook the edifices of the Forum. My eyes instantly followed the direction of hers, and I saw, high up in one of the overhanging towers, a white handkerchief waved once and again from a window. My companion held up her right hand, I could not help thinking as if in answer to this signal; but she said nothing, and I walked by her side in silence. We proceeded between the arches, and so up the hanging stairs, and, in a word, had soon reached the level of the Capitol, from whence, looking back, I could perceive the whole array of the forensic multitudes far below me, and hear the noise of their shouting, quite softened by the distance. The child paused with me for a moment at the summit

of the ascent, and then, still saying nothing, conducted me across two magnificent squares, and round about the great temple of Jupiter, until, at length, she stopped at one of the side-doors of an edifice, which, from the manner in which it was guarded, I already suspected to be the great prison, which is also called the Mammertine.

The girl knocked, and he who kept the gate, saluting her cheerfully, allowed us to pass without question into the interior of the prison. My companion then took a key from her girdle, and herself opening a door on the right-hand of the inner court, tripped before me along many passages, and up many stairs, till we reached at length a part of the building which was arranged in such a manner that I could with difficulty believe it to belong to a place of confinement and punishment. She ushered me into a convenient antechamber, and then left me, saying, "Sit down, sir, if it please you, and I will tell my father that you are come."

The little damsel had not been gone above a minute or two, ere a door, different from that by which I had come into the chamber, was opened, and the old priest (whose name, if I have not before mentioned it, was Aurelius Felix) entered, along with a mild-looking man of middle age, whom he desired me to salute as the keeper of the prison, saying, "Here, Valerius, is that Silo of whom yesterday evening you spake with so great admiration. But I hope the benevolence of a Christian will ere long cease to be an object of so much wonder in your eyes."

"My father," said the jailer, "methinks you yourself say too much about such little things. But, in the mean time, let us ask Valerius if he has heard any thing of what has been determined by Cesar."

I answered by telling what I had just heard from Licinius; upon which the countenance of the old man was not a little lightened; but Silo fixed his eyes upon the ground, and, I thought, seemed to regard the matter very seriously. He said, however, after a pause, "So far, at least, it is well. Let us hope that the calumnies which have been detected may turn more and more of discredit upon those who have gone abroad con-

cerning that which is dearer to you, my father, and to all your true companions, than any thing of what men call their own. But, alas ! these, after all, are but poor tidings for us to carry to our dear young lady."

"Fear not," answered Aurelius ; "have I not told you already oftentimes, that strength of heart goes not with bone and sinew, and that my gentle child is prepared for all things ? She also well knows that the servant is not greater than his master."

So saying, the old man motioned to us to remain where we were, and withdrew again by the same door at which he had entered. I sat for some minutes by the side of Silo, who continued to look downward, and who was, indeed, manifestly much troubled by the news which I had brought. After a space, he arose and walked very dejectedly back and forward in my presence, but still said not a word, until at length the same modest little damsel opened the door by which the old priest had departed, and said, "Father, Aurelius is in the lady's chamber, and he desired me to bring Valerius."

The father, smiling mournfully upon his child, pointed to me as if to bid me follow her, and I prepared to do so ; but he himself continued where he was, still walking to and fro, as if lost in meditation.

The child led me, therefore, into the adjoining chamber, and tapped gently at a door on the other side of it. The voice of the old priest bade us come in, and Athanasia, who had been sitting by his side, arose with him to receive me. She was dressed in a simple white tunic, her hair was braided in dark folds upon her forehead, her countenance was calm, and, but for the paleness of her lips, and a certain something that was just visible in her eyes, I should have said that her gravity scarcely partook of sadness. When, however, we had exchanged our salutations, it was evident that some effort had been necessary for all this appearance of serenity ; for her voice trembled when she spoke to me,—yes, her voice trembled in every tone, and, as she stooped to caress my young guide, who had sat down by her feet upon the ground, I saw the tear that had been gathering drop

heavily, and lose itself among the bright clusters of the little damsel's hair.

The girl, in the mean time, perceiving nothing of Athanasia's trouble, continued to play with a linnet which sat upon her finger, and to imitate, after her childish fashion, the notes of the bird. From time to time she turned round, as if to attract the lady's notice to the beauty of her favourite, and lifted upward her smiling eyes, the pure azure of which reflected the careless glee of innocence. But at length another and another drop fell full upon the cheek of the damsel, and then she looked upward more steadily, and seeing that, in truth, Athanasia wept, her own eyes began immediately to overflow with the ready tears of childhood. Athanasia pressed the girl to her bosom, and made one struggle more—but it would not do—for her heart was running to the brim, and, at last, with one passionate sob, all the sluices gave way, and she was dissolved at once in a flood of weeping. I took her unresisting hand, and imitated as best I could the language of consolation—which, alas! I had not to give. But it seemed as if my poor whispers only served to increase the misery they were meant to still. She stooped, and covered her face with her hands, and sobs and tears were mingled together, and the blood glowed red in her neck, in the deep agony of her lamentation.

I looked round, and saw that the old priest was moved at first scarcely less than myself by all this sorrowful sight. Yet the calmness of age deserted him not long, and after a moment there remained nothing on his countenance but the gravity and the tenderness of compassion. He arose from his seat, and without saying a single word either to Athanasia or to myself, walked quietly towards the end of the apartment, from which when he returned, after a brief space, there was an ancient volume held open in his hand. Still, without addressing us, the old man resumed his seat, which was right over-against the disconsolate maiden, and immediately, in a voice touched—and but touched—with tremour, he began to read aloud, in the Greek tongue, words which were then new, and which have ever since

been in a peculiar manner dear to me. You, my friends, know them well; and surely none are to be found in all the Scriptures more beautiful than those sacred words of the royal poet of the Hebrews:—

“God,” said the old man, and his voice gained strength from every word as he uttered it,—“God is our refuge and strength: a very present help in trouble.

“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed; though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

“Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled;

“Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

Athanasia took her hands from her face, and gradually composing herself, looked through her tears upon the old man as he proceeded.

“There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God;

“The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High;

“God is in the midst of her.

“She shall not be moved;

“God shall help her, and that right early.

“The heathen raged; the kingdoms were moved;

“He uttered his voice; the earth melted.

“The Lord of Hosts is with us;

“The God of Jacob is our refuge.”

The blood had mounted high in the countenance of Aurelius, and his voice had become strong and full, ere he reached these last words of triumphant confidence. The tears also had been all dried up on the pale cheek of Athanasia; and although her voice was not heard, I saw that her lips moved fervently along with those of the fervent priest. Even in me, who knew not well from whence they proceeded, the words of the royal prophet produced I know not what of buoyance and of emotion, and perhaps my lips, too, had involuntarily essayed to follow them; for when he paused from his reading, the old man turned to me with a face full of benignity, and said, “Yes, Valerius, it is even so; Homer, Pindar, Æschylus—these, indeed, can stir the

blood ; but it is such poetry as this that alone can sooth in sorrow, and strengthen in the hour of tribulation. Your vain-glorious Greeks called all men barbarians but themselves ; and yet these words, and thousands not less precious than these, consoled the afflictions, and ennobled the triumphs of the chosen people of the race of Israel long, long years ere ever the boasted melody of Ionian or Doric verses had been heard of. From this alone, young man, you may judge what measure of candour inhabits along with the disdain of our proud enemies,—how fairly, without question, or opportunity of defence, the charge of barbarity is heaped upon what they are pleased to call our *superstition*,—how wisely the learned and the powerful of the earth have combined in this league against the truth which they know not,—of which they fear or despise the knowledge." The old man paused for a moment, and then laying his hand upon the volume that was open before him, and casting his eyes upward, said, in a deep and earnest whisper, "Surely the truth is mighty, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her."

"But, alas ! my dear father," said Athanasia, "I fear me this is not the place, nor the situation, in which Valerius might be most likely to listen to your words. It may be that his own narrow escape, to say nothing of our present danger, has rendered him even more cautious than he was before."

"And who, my dear child," he replied hastily,—“and who is he that shall dare to blame caution, or to preach, above all in such things as these, the rashness that is of folly ? No, no ; Valerius will not believe that we, like the miserable creatures whose impious songs we heard last night together, are studious only of working upon the fears of the ignorant, and harassing, with dark and lying dreams, the imaginations of the simple. Here” (he laid his hand once more upon the sacred volume)—“*here* are no wild stories of blood-thirsty deities and self-sacrificing maniacs. *Here* all is plain—clear—perspicuous. *Here* is that which Socrates vainly sought by all the ingenuity of reason. *Here* is that of which some faint and mysterious anticipations

would appear to have been shadowed forth in the sublime obscurity of the visions of Plato. *Here* is that which, as that mighty martyr who died in this very city hath said, innumerable prophets and kings of the old time desired to see, and yet saw not. Do nothing rashly, young man ; but it is possible, as you yourself well know, that this may be the last opportunity I shall ever have of speaking with you ; and therefore, before we part, I must needs charge you solemnly, that henceforth you are not one of those who are altogether ignorant ; and that if your knowledge increase not, the sin shall be upon your head. I charge you, Valerius" (he rose from his seat as he spoke), "I charge you, that when you return once more to your native island you blot not out from your memory the things that you have seen and heard in this great city of light and darkness. Examine—judge—ask aid, and aid shall not be refused you—but I charge you, as your soul is precious, I charge you once more, young man, neither to overlook in carelessness, nor to reject in rashness. I take Athanasia to witness for me, that I have given you the warning that is needful."

"Oh, sir !" said Athanasia, "I am sure it shall not be in vain that you have done so. I am sure Valerius will never forget this hour—"

She gazed in my face as she said so, and a tear was again visible, dimming the clear dark crystal of her eye, yet on all her countenance there was no other semblance of passion ; all besides was calm, serene, heroic ; one lucid drop alone was there to tinge the majesty of resignation with the human grace of melancholy. The venerable Aurelius looked upon her with the pride and the pity of a father, and clasping his old thin hands together, whispered (for I think he had no power to say it more aloud), "Would to God that I were here alone ! Shall the axe be laid to the root of the fair young tree that hath but begun to blossom, when so many old trunks stand around withered by the lightnings, and sore broken by the winds ! The will of the Lord be done."

"Amen ! amen !" said Athanasia, taking the old man by the hand, and smiling, I think, more cheerfully than

I had yet seen her. "My dear father," she continued, "I fear you yourself, after all, are teaching Valerius to take but a sad farewell of us."

"Alas! my child," he replied, "he must have a hard heart who could look unmoved on that sweet face in this hour of sadness. But cheer up, my child, we must not forget that we are in the hands of a greater than Trajan. If so it please Him, all may yet go well with us even here upon the earth. You may live to see many happy years among your kindred; and I" (the old man smiled most serenely)—"and for me, my gray hairs may be laid in bloodless dust. Once more, my noble maiden, the will of the Lord be done. God forbid that we should be choosers for ourselves; whatever cup awaits us, blessed be the name of the Lord!"

So saying, the old man retired from the chamber, and once more I was left alone in the presence of Athanasia. I took from my bosom the book and letter which I had placed there, and laid them on her knee. She broke the seal, and read hastily what Thraso had written, and then concealed the scroll within her tunic, saying, "Alas! Valerius, little did the brave old soldier suspect how soon his peril was to be mine; will you permit me like him to make you my messenger? will you seek out my cousin, my sister, and tell Sempronia in what condition you have found me?—no, not in what you found—but in what you now see me. Will you go, Valerius, and speak comfort to my poor friend? Her pity, at least, I am sure is mingled with no angry thoughts; and yet she only has reason to complain, for her secret thoughts were not hid from me, and alas! I concealed mine from her."

"I have already seen her," said I, "and you do her no more than justice. But, indeed, Sempronius himself thinks of you even as gently as his daughter."

"I doubt it not, Valerius; but alas! there are many others besides these; and I know not what relic of weakness it is, but methinks I could have borne the worst more easily, had it not been for what I picture to myself of their resentment. The priestess—I dread that priestess—Alas! I am cut off for ever from the memory of my kindred."

"Weep not again," said I, "if you pity me, weep not. Oh, Athanasia! why did you save me from the sword of that Cotilius? Miserable day, that I first opened my eyes upon Rome; and, oh! most miserable hour, that first—"

"Nay, nay," she interrupted me; "lament not that which is past, and which never can be recalled." In saying so, she walked towards the window of the apartment, and I followed her footsteps. She threw open the lattice, as if that she might inhale the free air, and her eyes wandered to and fro over all the magnificent prospect that lay stretched out below us—the temples and high porticoes of the Forum—the gleaming battlements and long arcades of the Palatine—the baths, and theatres, and circuses between—and the river—yellow Tiber, winding away among the fields and groves, far beyond the blue ridges of the silent hills—and the clear sky of Italy extending over all things its beaming arch of splendour. We were far above the Forum, and when the trumpets were blown by the gate of the Senate-house, the sound floated upward to us as gently as if it had been borne over the waters. The shouts of the multitude were heard echoed and faintly re-echoed from the towers and the rocks. The princely pageant showed like a pomp of pigmies; spear, and helmet, and eagle glittered together almost like dews upon the distant herbage. Athanasia looked and listened for a moment, and then rested her eye once more upon the wide range of the champaign, where green fields and dark forests were spread out in interminable succession, away towards the northern region and the visible mountains. She raised her hand, and pointed to the verge of the horizon, and said to me, "Valerius, your home lies far away yonder. I must give you something which you shall promise me to carry with you to Britain—and preserve there, in memory—in memory—of Rome."

Before I had time to make any answer, she had turned from me, and taken out of a casket that stood upon the table beside which she had been sitting, a scroll of parchment, bound with a silk riband, which she imme-

diately put into my hands, and, "To-morrow," said she, "Valerius, our fate, they tell us, must at length be determined; if we share the fate of Thraso, the last gift of Thraso shall be yours. If, however, any mercy be extended to us, I cannot part with that memorial of a dying martyr. I must keep to myself the old man's favourite volume, for it was for me he had designed it. But, in the mean time, you see that I have taken care that you shall not be a loser. I have made a copy of the same book for yourself. I have written it since I came hither, Valerius, and you must not despise it because the Mammertine has not furnished the finest of materials. Take this, Valerius, and take it with my thanks—my prayers. I know you will not forget my message to my dear sister. Sextus and she—may many happy days be theirs—and yours."

I kissed the sad gift, and placed it in my bosom.

"Valerius," she said, "dear Valerius, you weep, you weep; now dry up your tears, Caius, for I cannot bear to see you weep. You weep for me because I am a Christian; but forget not that the old Roman blood flows in my veins, and think not that its current is chilled, because I have foresworn the worship of idol and demon, and am in peril for the service of The Living God. You think I am but an enthusiastic girl, not knowing either what I have left or what I have embraced, and you pity me as a victim of ignorance—"

"God forbid," said I; "I weep for you, Athanasia, but not for you alone. Alas! here is no time for ceremony, and silence breaks my heart—I love you, Athanasia; you know that I love you, and yet you tear my heart-strings by speaking to me as if I were a stranger. Lady," said I, for the first effort was every thing, "you must forgive me—you must pardon me. Had the world gone fairly, I know not when I should have dared to say such things to you; I know not if I ever should have dared. But now—nay, look not so calmly upon me, for that is worst of all—*now*, alas! what avails it whether I keep the ways of the world, or desert them utterly, as all fair hopes have deserted me? I ask nothing—I hope nothing—but I could not bear to part from you thus, and

not to tell you that when I part from you, I bid farewell to all things. Pardon me—once more pardon me.”

Athanasia kept her eye upon me quite steadfastly, while I poured out these wild words; but her hand was placed in mine all the while, and I felt it cold and trembling. A single flush of crimson passed over her face, and then that too was as pale as marble, and I saw her lips move, but the syllables died ere they were uttered. She continued for a moment gazing so, and pale and trembling; and then at last she fell upon my bosom and wept, not audibly, but I felt her tears.

My Athanasia was still folded to my bosom, in that strange agony of sorrow and of confidence, when Silo the jailer entered the apartment, abrupt and breathless.

“Oh, sir!” said he, “your sufferings are mine; but it is necessary that you should leave us, and on the instant, for the prefect is already at the gate, and unquestionably he will examine every part of the prison; and should you be recognised as the person who was taken in the monument, you see plainly to what suspicions it might give rise. Come then, sir, and let me secure your escape; we shall take care to warn you of whatever occurs, and we shall send for you, if there be opportunity.”

Athanasia recovered herself almost instantly when she heard what Silo said.

“We shall meet again,” said I.

“At least once more,” replied she, “at least once more, Valerius.”

And I tore myself away from her; and the jailer having once again committed me to the guidance of his child, I was in a few moments conducted to the same postern by which I had been introduced. In a word, I found myself in the court of the Capitol at the instant when the prefect, with all his attendants, was entering by the main gate of the Mammertine.

The day was by this time considerably advanced, and I hastened homeward, in hopes of finding Licinius and having some conversation with him in private before the hour of supper. When I reached his house, however, I was told that he was still absent; and found at the same time a billet upon the table, which informed

me that Sabinus had carried Sextus with him to his quarters, and that both expected I would join them there immediately upon my return. I knew not how to refuse compliance, and yet I could not bear the thought of being so far from the Capitol, in case of any message being sent to me from the prison. Since I could do no better, however, I charged Boto to remain in my apartment till sunset, and bring me, without delay, any letter or messenger that might arrive in my absence. Should none such appear within that space, I gave him a note, which I desired him to deliver into the hands of Silo; and having, as I thought, furnished him with sufficient directions how to discharge this commission, I myself took the path to the Prætorian camp, where I was sure at least of kindness, if not of consolation.

You will wonder, indeed, when I tell you, what is nevertheless most true, that I felt less need of consolation at that moment than I had done at any one time during the several busy and unhappy days that had just passed over my head. In vain should I seek to explain to you from what strange mysterious workings of my mind it came to be so. Divine them if you can—think of me as you please—but there were moments in which, as I walked along towards the residence of Sabinus, I felt—yes, in spite of all the darkness that surrounded the fate of my Athanasia—I felt as if some new light had streamed upon my path—as if some weight of intolerable lead had been lifted from my bosom—as if a heart dry and parched had been suddenly plunged in some current of life and refreshment—as if sorrow had faded into a phantom, and my lips had been taught some secret irresistible charm, by which the envious shade could for ever be chased into darkness.

No, I speak rashly; I paint it brighter than it was. There was still upon me the sense of something cold, black, grasping; I could not forget for a moment that reality lay frowning around me; fear hung over me like an evil bird, with wide, strong, hovering wings; gulfs lay open before me—deep gulfs, from which my eye turned like a coward. Yet all was not darkness—all was not heaviness. Despair was not. A beam—a

healing beam had penetrated the thick gloom of the tempest—a rainbow hung glittering in calm brightness athwart the blackest places of the heaven—one pure azure spot gleamed steadily between the darkness of the lowering clouds. I knew that Athanasia loved me—utter misery could no longer be mine—I had no right to be miserable. Death itself could not dry up the tears that had been shed upon my bosom. O the pride and the inalienable happiness of youthful love! No affliction, no terror has power to take away its buoyancy of blessedness; the memory of it is the inexhaustible treasure of the soul; the vision of young tenderness hovers day and night before the dim eye of age; and Hope and Faith sit like two white-robed angels by the restoring tomb.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGE as all this may appear to you, it was therefore with (comparatively speaking) something of a lightened heart that I passed along the Mounds of Tarquin, beyond which, as I have already told you, the Prætorian camp is situated. When I drew near to the camp itself, and came within sight of the guard-house where I had visited Thraso, and of the old fig-tree beneath which I had recognised Athanasia, it is true, the darker picture prevailed for a moment over all the light I had been able to see, or to fancy. Nevertheless, even these sad memorials could not effectually compete with the natural elements of hope that were so strong within me; and even Sabinus, who was by no means the closest of observers, said, the moment I entered his apartment, that he was quite sure I had heard good news of my lawsuit; or else, he added in a whisper, of some affair almost as interesting to me.

When I told him, in reply to this, where I had been,

and in what condition I had left Athanasia, the countenance of the good-natured centurion immediately fell, and he said, "Well, my dear Caius, I am glad to see that you have at least learned one good thing since you came to Rome; and that is, not to let your face lie open like a text-book, for every booby to read your thoughts upon. Let us hope, however, my dear boy, that you may not long have occasion for putting any such lessons in practice—at least not in the way you are now doing. To-night or to-morrow we shall certainly know the best or the worst of it; and in the mean time, you must play the soldier among soldiers, and remember that Anacreon is your only true camp oracle."

He concluded the sentence with one of his usual whistles, in which there was perhaps more of hilarity than of music; and, beating time with his heel upon the ground, chanted the merry lines of the Teian reprobate,—

"To-morrow comes! while here I sit,
What have I to do with it?"

A gray-haired tribune, with one eye, and a thin yellow face, seamed all over with wrinkles, walked, or rather halted, into the room at that moment, and took the strain out of the mouth of the jolly centurion,—squeaking very dolefully,—

"Why, oh why, when joy is here—
When the sky is bright and clear—
Why be dreaming about sorrow,
And clouds that come not till to-morrow?"

After having quavered with an air of great self-satisfaction upon the last note of which, the old gentleman said, "Come, Sabinus, there is no time to be lost; there is to be such a crowd to-day, that if you wish your friends to sit near the master of the feast, you had better adjourn to the Julius; I looked into the kitchen as I came along."

"Of course you did, tribune," interrupted Sabinus, laughing.

"I looked into the kitchen," he proceeded, "and you

may laugh, if you please, at the news I have to tell you, but, by the genius of Trajan, I never saw such a boar since I was born. By Jove, what firmness! what a beautiful brown! 'tis a most illustrious boar!"

"You speak like a very Antony," quoth the centurion; "but come, boys, since it is so, I know not why we should linger. I am glad that the camp is not to be disgraced by the supper—and as to the wine—I say nothing—but I believe, tribune, we can show them something."

So saying, these two commanders led us into the great banquetting-room, where several of those high-fed warriors who had more than once disposed of the empire were already reclining upon rich couches around the board on which this tusked charmer was expected to make his appearance. Sextus and I obeyed the directions of our host, and took our places, not without some feelings of humility, in the presence of those lordly personages, whose effeminate exterior would, perhaps, have made them less formidable in my eyes, had I not remembered the youth of the great Cæsar, the Parthian retreat of Antony, and the recent death of Otho.*

There were present, besides these luxurious soldiers, a few casual visitors like ourselves, who seemed quite as fond of good eating as any of the rest; among others, a sleek Flamen, who reclined on the right-hand of the presiding tribune, and a little bald Greek, who seemed to think it incumbent upon himself to fill up every pause in the conversation by malicious anecdotes or sarcasms, of which last it was easy to see that the Flamen opposite to him was frequently the subject. That sacred character, on his part, so long as the supper lasted, did not appear to give himself much trouble about any thing the Greek chose to say; his eye seldom wandered from his cover, unless when it was in search of some particular sauce or condiment; and if he interrupted his eating now and then, it was only for the purpose of sipping a little out of a certain richly-chased goblet, that stood within easy reach of his fingers. The Greek, on the other hand, became every

* ——— Catonem
Novisti moriens vincere, mollis Otho, &c.

moment more and more free in his remarks, and even hazarded a few jokes, which it was impossible not to consider as extremely irreligious in their tendency. Neither wit nor impiety, however, could make any impression upon the smooth-faced Flamen, who seemed to think, if one might judge from his behaviour, that the most acceptable service he could render to the deities was to do full and devout justice to the gifts of their benevolence. There was so much of seriousness in the good man's style, both of eating and of drinking, that one could scarcely suspect him of being actuated by feelings of a less dignified nature. The scene, nevertheless, appeared to furnish infinite amusement to the spectators; above all, to that extremely fat and short-necked commander who acted as master of the revels,—who laughed so heartily every now and then, that his face looked black rather than purple, and that I could not help thinking there was some ground for what I heard whispered more than once among some of his juniors. Perhaps I need scarcely add, that the word *apoplexy* was one of those I overheard.

A very animated discussion concerning the newly-arrived cohorts (which, I have told you, had taken place that morning by the river-side) relieved for some time the patient Flamen from the attacks of this irreverent person, and engaged the zealous participation of those who had hitherto been the most silent of the company. Sabinus, among the rest, was ready with a world of remarks upon the equipments, the manœuvres, the merits and the demerits of the troops in question; but something he said was quite at variance with the sentiments of one of his brother centurions, who disputed with him rather warmly than successfully, for a few moments, and at last ended with saying, "But why should I take so much trouble to discuss the matter with you, who, we all know, were thinking of other matters, and saw not much more of the review than if you had been a hundred miles off from it?"

The centurion coloured a little, and laughed, as it seemed to me, with rather less heartiness than usual; but the disputant, pursuing his advantage, said, "Yes, yes, you may laugh if you will; but do you think we are all blind, or do you suppose we are not acquainted with certain

particulars? Well, some people dislike the Suburra, but for my part, I agree with Sabinus; I think it is one of the genteelst places in Rome, and that there are some of the snuggest houses in it too; and if old men will die—for me, I protest, I don't see why young men should not succeed them."

The centurion laughed again, and natural ruddiness of complexion was, I thought, scarcely quite sufficient to account for the flush on his countenance, as he listened to these inuendoes. But the master of the feast cut the matter short, by saying that he had a health to propose, and that he expected all present should receive it with honour.—"Here," said he, "is to the fair Lady Rubellia, who is never absent when the Prætorians turn out; and may all things fair and fortunate attend her now and hereafter."

I pledged the toast, as in duty bound, and whispered to Sabinus, "My friend, I think you have really some reason for blushing. Oh, fy! to go and make table-talk of it so immediately. If you had no pity on Xerophrates, you might at least have had some pity for the pretty widow."

He made no answer to this, and looked, if possible, more confused than ever; but, just at that moment, a soldier came in, and delivered a billet to the presiding tribune, who handed it to Sabinus immediately after he had read it, and said, loud enough to be heard by all those who sat near him, "I wish the prince would give some of this work to these new comers. But, indeed, I wonder what lictors are good for nowadays. I think the Prætorians might be spared such jobs as this; but every thing that these Christians are any way concerned in seems to be a matter of importance."

Sabinus, having read the billet, handed it back again to the tribune, and said, "So *exit* Cotilius!—well, and so we must play the chorus to the falling of his curtain."

The tribune shrugged his shoulders, whispered something into the ear of the messenger, and then, dashing more wine into his cup, said, "By Jove, it is my most humble opinion, that Rome will never be a quiet place,

nor the Prætorian helmet a comfortable head-piece, till these barbarians be extirpated."

The Flamen tossed off a full goblet, and smiting with his hand upon the table, said, "There spake a true Roman, and a worshipper of the gods. I rejoice to find that there is still some religion in the world; for, what with skulking Jews on the one hand, and bold blasphemous Cyrenæans on the other, so help me Jupiter, the general prospect is dark enough!"

"In my opinion," quoth the bald Greek, putting on an air of some gravity, and staring the Flamen full in the face, "in my humble opinion, the Jews will have the better of the Cyrenæans. Indeed, I should not be much surprised to see this Christian superstition supplant every other."

The Flamen half-started from his seat, and opened his eyes as if rage had half-strangled him: but his wrath was speechless, and he sat down again to devour it.

"You observe, gentlemen," proceeded the Greek, in a tone of the most perfect composure, "you observe what great advantage any new superstition has over any thing of the same sort that is old. We all know, for example, that Isis and Cybele have for many years past left comparatively few worshippers to Mars, Apollo,—even to Jupiter."

The Flamen, with a face on fire, twisted himself on his seat. The Greek perceived that he had at last touched him in a tender place, and, conveying additional solemnity into his visage, pursued his triumph.

"It is, indeed, most melancholy, most lamentable," quoth he; "but it is nevertheless most true. I have heard that, unless upon some very great day, a gift is now quite a rarity upon the altar of any of the true ancient deities of Rome. Egypt and Mount Ida have done this; and, upon my word, I don't see why Palestine should not succeed as well as either of them; for I suppose cant and buffoonery are pretty much the same things all the world over. In the mean time, the enlightened contemplate every different manifestation of the superstitious principle with equal indifference; and, I confess to you, I have been a little surprised to perceive how far Trajan is from

imitating their example. But that Chæronæan master of his, that Plutarch, was always a perfect old woman ; and I fear the prince has not been able to shake off the impression of his ridiculous stories. They say, the old proser has become a priest himself (I forget of what deity) since he returned to his village. It were well if he contented himself with imposing upon those rustics ; but it is rather too much to think of such a person having any influence with the master of the empire—and such a master, too, as Trajan !”

“ Hush, hush !” quoth the master of the day, “ you forget in what company you are ; and besides, if it please you, you must remember that nothing can be said here against either Trajan or his friends ; and as for Plutarch, let me tell you, I remember Plutarch very well ; and he was—whatever you may say of him—he was one of the pleasantest fellows that I ever met with.”

“ I doubt it not—I doubt it not,” cried the Greek, perceiving that he had carried the thing too far.

“ You doubt it not, sir ?” quoth the Flamen at length, recovering the use of his tongue : “ I am glad, I assure you, that there is any thing you don’t doubt. But answer me one thing, Master Believer, do you believe that your body and your soul are made of the same clay ? do you believe there is any after-state, in which the faults of the *now* shall be corrected ?”

“ My dear Flamen,” answered he, relapsing into his old tone, “ I suppose you don’t yourself believe that every thing is as well as it might be ?”

“ No, sir,” quoth the other, very shortly, “ I believe no such thing ; and I never was less inclined to believe it, I promise you.”

“ The day may come, then,” resumed the bald man, with an air of great sagacity, “ the day may come when Falernian shall sparkle ready for drinking in the rivers—when thrushes shall hop about the trees broiled and trussed—and when man—perfected being!—shall say to the lamprey hissing in the pan, ‘ My friend, I think that side of you will do now ; pray turn round, if it please you ; and do you, mellow offspring of the olive, take care you don’t let him stick to the brass.’ Gentlemen, the Flamen

and I are, after all, you see, quite as one as to these matters."

The younger Prætorians laughed heartily along with the satirical Greek ; but the Flamen looked deadly pale for rage, and held his lips so firmly together, that I suppose he wished us to see he would have thought it profanation for him to address one word more to such a person as this scoffer. Sabinus alone appeared desirous of restoring the harmony of the assembly, and called forthwith on the same musical brother who had come into his apartment before supper, to join him in entertaining the company with a song. The old gentleman required much solicitation, and said fifty times over that he was a little hoarse ; but, nevertheless, he was audibly clearing his throat all the while, and he at last announced his consent to attempt the singing of the female part in the beautiful duet of Horace and Lydia. Sabinus, on his part, was always ready with the best he could do ; and accordingly began to roar out, without hesitation, in his usual boisterous fashion, the tender words of regret and expostulation, which the most elegant of poets has ascribed to himself. The delicate half-squeaking, half-murmuring response of the wrinkled representative of the inconstant Lydia afforded a contrast irresistibly ludicrous to the rough guard-house vociferation of the ever jovial Sabinus. But to the ill-suppressed mirth of the party my good-natured friend listened with the most perfect composure. He had turned the thoughts of his comrades into a new channel, which was all he had wished to do ; and nothing could afflict him less than the idea that he had accomplished his benevolent purpose at the expense of being a little laughed at. He concluded, however, with proposing a bumper to the charming Lydia ; and so, it must be confessed, continued to leave the best part of the burden on the shoulders of his companion.

All, in short, were once more in perfect good humour, when another soldier appeared behind the couch of the president, and handed to him what seemed to be another billet of the same complexion with the former one. He tossed the paper as before to my friend, who changed colour, and looked very serious as he read it. He looked

to me very earnestly, as he was about to return it, and I could not help asking him if it was any thing that concerned me.

"My dear Caius," he said in a whisper, "now do not alarm yourself—for, after all, it may be nothing ; but an additional guard is ordered to the Palatine, and the reason is said to be, that the rest of the Christian prisoners are to be examined by the emperor himself."

"And when—for the sake of Heaven!—when, Sabinus?"

"Now, now—this very evening—an hour hence. For Heaven's sake, compose yourself, my dear boy. Would you retire to my apartment?"

I mastered myself as well as I could, and resolved, if possible, not to quit the room so very abruptly. I told Sextus, however, what I had heard, and desired him not to be astonished if I should ere long make my escape. The poor boy shared visibly in all my agitation ; but I had scarcely had a moment to compose myself, when one of the slaves who were in attendance whispered to me that a person wished to speak with me in the ante-chamber. Sabinus insisted upon accompanying me—Sextus did the same—and we all three, having made our excuses, hastened to the hall, where my messenger was expecting me.

It was Dromo, and he stood panting for breath.

"Sir," said he, "I have no time for explanation. Silo wishes to see you, and instantly ; I left Boto along with him at the Mammertine."

"Run," said Sextus ; "let us run, my dear Caius. Sabinus and I will both go along with you."

"No, no," said Dromo ; "nobody must go along with him but myself—no one else can be of any use ; and as for the centurion, the guard is already waiting for him in the court."

"Ha!" said Sabinus, "so very speedily do they attend me? Run, then, run, my dear Valerius. I shall be at the Palatine on the instant ; and be sure I shall come to you the moment the watch is out. Run, and remember what I said to you. Forget not that you are a man, and a Roman."

So saying, the centurion took his sword and helmet, and before Dromo and I were beyond the precincts of the camp, we saw him mounted, and at the head of his squadron. They passed us a few yards beyond the gate, and although we pursued them hastily, the beat of hoofs and the ring of armour were soon far beyond our hearing.

CHAPTER XII.

MOVING at this rapid pace, we had come within sight of the towers of the Capitol, ere Dromo declared himself no longer able to sustain the same exertion.

"And after all," said he, looking to the west, from which the last blush of sunset had not yet entirely passed away, "after all, we shall be in good time. We shall find Silo and Boto still together; for the hour is not yet come at which the prisoners were ordered to the Palatine."

I made some inquiry why it was that Boto had not come to me himself, and received an explanation which I must give to you more briefly than Dromo gave it to me.

You must know, then, that Boto, mistrusting his own recollection of my instructions, had requested Dromo to assist him in finding his way to the Mammertine; and it was so that the Cretan had come to be witness of a scene which, in spite of all his sarcastic disposition, he could not narrate to me without many tokens of sympathy. I think I mentioned to you once before, that my faithful slave, in coming with me to Rome, had indulged the hope of meeting once more with his brother, who, many years before our journey took place, had been carried off from Britain in the train of a Roman officer of distinction. I smiled when the poor man expressed to me his ignorant confidence that his brother would certainly find him out, ere he had been many days in the metropolis of the world. But now, as it turned out, a fortunate accident had abundantly recompensed him for many hours of ill-regulated search. He had found his brother, and he had found him

in the Mammertine. In a word, the British bondsman had been one of the luckiest of men ; and the brother of my own slave was no other than that humane Silo, to whose kindness I, and one dearer to me than myself, had already been so deeply indebted. The Cretan, himself a slave, and an exile long banished from his kindred, described, in a tone of melancholy interest, a scene which, in itself, must have exhibited almost as much of sorrow as of joy. He had partaken in all the feelings of the long-lost brothers, and hastened to bring me from the Prætorian camp, that Boto might be spared the pain of immediately parting from him whom he had just found in a manner so unlooked for, and in a condition so far above his expectations. "And yet," said he, "I had some difficulty in prevailing on Boto to permit me to do this ; for, after his first transports were over, it seemed to be the most fervent wish of his heart to be able to tell you of his good fortune, and present to you his brother."

But I have no time at present to tell you more of what passed between me and the Cretan. The red tints of the western sky were every moment becoming faint and more faint, and I hurried along the darkening street, and up the ascent of the Capitoline, scarce listening to the story, which, at any other moment, I need not tell you would have commanded all my attention, and all my sympathy. We reached the summit, and found the magnificent courts and the temple of Jupiter already occupied by various detachments of mounted soldiers. I hastened, between their scattered groups, on to the gate of the Mammertine, and, at the moment when I had reached it, recognised, at some distance, the strong voice of Sabinus calling out, "Stand, Eagle ; comrades, close up !" The horn sounded as he spoke, as if in echo to the command, and, before the postern opened to admit us, the Prætorian squadron had formed themselves into a compact line, right over-against the great gate of the prison. I saw Sabinus take his place at the head of the array, and ran to speak to him. "My dear Caius," said he, stooping on his horse, "would to Heaven I had been spared this duty ! Cotilius comes forth this moment, and then we go back to the Palatine ; and I fear—I fear we are to guar-

thither your Athanasia. If you wish to enter the prison, hasten your steps; and may you be stronger than you hope. Go, go, my dear boy," he added. "By Jove, I had rather pursue the Parthian!—but what must be, must." He squeezed my hand, and I hastened away from him. Dromo stood along with the door-keeper at the open postern, and we glided into the prison, which was now no longer silent, as I had found it in the morning, but resounding in all its courts and arches with bustle and hurry, and the noise of fatal preparation.

We had scarcely entered the inner court ere Sabinus also, and about a score of his Prætorians, rode into it by the main approach. Silo and Boto were standing together; and both had already hastened towards me; but the jailer, seeing the centurion, was constrained to part from me almost before I had time to take him by the hand, or to lift up my poor Boto, who, not I think without tears, had embraced my knees the instant he perceived me. His brother, however, who seemed scarcely less affected than he, attended not Sabinus till he had whispered a single word in my ear,—“Oh! sir, now, more than ever, how does all this torture me! Pity me, for I also am most wretched. But you know the way—here, take this key—hasten to the apartment, which you know—and oh! spare yourself at least the needless pain of witnessing this scene of blood, which—would to God it were the last—Oh! sir, let me not entreat you in vain; hasten to my dear lady, and tell her, for I have not the heart to do so, what commands have come to us from Trajan.”

Alas! said I to myself, of what tidings am I doomed ever to be the messenger!—but Athanasia was alone; and how could I shrink from any pain that might perhaps alleviate hers. I took the key the kind jailer offered me—I left the court, which was now blazing with the light of torches, and ringing with the muster of men and horses—I glided hastily along the dim corridors of the Mamertine, and stood once more at the door of the chamber in which I had parted from my Athanasia. No voice answered to my knock; I repeated it three times, and then, gitated with indistinct apprehension, hesitated no longer to open it. No lamp was burning within the chamber;

but through one of its two windows, both of which stood open to receive the mild air of the evening, there entered a wavering glare of deep saffron-coloured light, which showed me Athanasia extended on her couch, her head pillowed upon her left arm, and her right hand buried in the mazes of her dark hair, which lay loose and dishevelled upon her placid bosom. I say placid, for, fierce and unnatural as was the inconstant gleam that passed and repassed over her features, its ominous and troubled hue had no power to mar the image of her sleeping tranquillity. There lay she, her large serene eyelids closed in their calmness upon orbs that were so soon to be awakened upon all the fierceness of peril—all the gloom of terror. A smile—a sweet composed smile sat on her virgin lips, and her tunic scarce betrayed the modest heaving of her bosom. I hung over her for a moment, and was about—oh! how unwillingly—to disturb that slumber—perhaps that last slumber of peace and innocence—when the chamber-walls were visited with a broader and a yet deeper glare, and my footsteps, I know not by what instinct, were drawn half-unconsciously to the window by which the light had access.

“Caius, Caius,” she whispered, as I stepped from beside the couch; “why do you leave me, Valerius? stay, stay, my Valerius.”

I looked back, but her eyelids were still closed; the same calm smile was upon her dreaming lips. The light streamed redder and more red—all in an instant became as quiet without as within. I approached the open window, and saw Cotilius standing far below in the midst of the prison-court; the torches all around—the horsemen drawn up in silence on either side—and a single soldier close behind him, resting upon an unsheathed glittering sword, as in expectation of the signal.

Sabinus, meantime, who sat on horseback immediately over-against the prisoner, was stooping down and speaking with Silo; but ere I had looked for another moment he dismissed the jailer, and I saw him nod to the trumpeter, who immediately lifted his trumpet to his mouth. Cotilius showed, by one rapid gesture, that he understood the meaning of the nod, and seemed to plant himself with more

firmness upon his feet, his eye all the while being fixed steadfastly upon the centurion. The glare of the torches was so strong that I saw every thing as clearly as if the scene had passed at noonday. I saw Cotilius's keen blue eye as fierce as ever—I saw his lips pressed together steadily upon his teeth—I saw that the blood was still fervid in his cheeks, for the complexion of this man was of the same bold and florid brightness, so uncommon in Italy, which you have seen represented in the pictures of Sylla, and even the blaze of the torches seemed to strive in vain to heighten its natural scarlet. The trumpet was, as I have said, at the man's lips, and the soldier had lifted his sword from the ground, and my eye was fixed, as if by fascination, upon the bare throat of the prisoner, when suddenly a deep voice was heard amid the deadly silence, calling several times, "Cotilius! Cotilius!—look up, Cotilius!"

The eye of Cotilius obeyed the summons more slowly than that of any other person who was present there—but at last it did obey it; and he and I, and all the rest, beheld Aurelius Felix, the Christian priest, standing at an open window, not far distant from that at which I myself was placed; and it was evident to all that it was from the old man's lips the voice had proceeded. Cotilius regarded him steadfastly for a moment, and then resumed his former posture; but the old man called again more loudly than before—"Cotilius, Cotilius!" said he, and he stretched forth his fettered hand as he spake, and the sound of his voice was alike clear, earnest, and solemn—"Cotilius! I charge thee, look upon the hand from which the blessed water of baptism was cast upon thy head. I charge thee, look upon me, and say truly, ere yet the blow be given, upon what hope thy thoughts are fixed? Is this sword bared against the rebel of Cesar, or a martyr of Jesus? I charge thee, speak ere thy blood flows;—and for thy soul's sake, speak truly."

Cotilius kept his eye upon the old man while he was speaking, but I could not observe the least change in the expression of his countenance. When he was done, and even the soldiers that stood about appeared to be expecting his answer, a single bitter motion of derision passed

over his lips, and he nodded, as if impatiently, to the Prætorian whose lips were upon the end of the trumpet. The man blew, and while yet the surrounding arches were echoing the sound, the sword-bearer had executed his office, and the headless trunk fell heavily upon the pavement. Instinctively I turned me on the instant from the bloody spectacle, and my eye rested again upon the couch of Athanasia—but not upon the vision of her tranquillity. The clap with which the body of Cotilius fell upon the smooth stones of the court had, perhaps, reached the sleeping ear, and we all know with what swiftness thoughts chase thoughts in the wilderness of dreams. So it was that she started in her sleep, at the very moment when the mortal blow was given. The hand that had been slumbering amid her dishevelled ringlets was pressed fervently upon her brow, and she whispered—(for it was still but a deep whisper, although there was in its breath the intense earnestness of agony)—the dreaming maid whispered, in a tone that chilled my blood even more than that which I had witnessed—"Spare me—spare me, Trajan, Cesar, Prince—have pity—have pity on my youth—I conjure thee to be merciful!"—Then she paused for a moment, and the whisper began again—"Strengthen, strengthen me, good Lord!—Valerius, we must not lie, Valerius—fy! fy! we must not lie to save life—Thraso! Thraso! I see him, I see him. It is but a blow—a blow, Valerius—ha! a beast—a tiger—spare—spare, Trajan—sharp white teeth—how his eyes glare—Thraso—Felix—Valerius, Valerius, come close to me—Caius, come close to me—"Tis not the sun, Caius—no, no, 'tis not the sun—you know 'tis moonlight, and this is brighter than the sun. Valerius, kiss me, kiss me once more, Valerius—are my lips so cold, so very cold?—fy!—come, come, let us remember we are Romans—'tis the trumpet!"

The Prætorian trumpet sounded the march in the court below, and the armed hoofs clanged aloud—and Athanasia, starting from her troubled sleep, gazed wildly around the reddened chamber. The long blast of the trumpet was indeed in her ear—and Valerius hung over her—but after a moment the cloud of the broken dream passed away, and the maiden smiled as she extended her hand to

me from the couch, and began to gather up the long loose ringlets that floated all down upon her shoulders. She blushed and smiled mournfully, and asked me hastily whence I came, and for what purpose I had come; but before I could answer, the glare that was yet in the chamber around her seemed anew to be perplexing her, and she gazed from me to the red walls, and from them to me again, and then once more the trumpet was blown, and the melodious horn replied to it, and Athanasia sprang from her couch as if visited with a sudden consciousness that she was somehow concerned in the tumult. I know not in what terms I was essaying to tell her what was the truth, but I know that ere I had said many words, she discovered what was my meaning. For a moment she looked deadly pale, in spite of all the glare of the torch-light; but she recovered herself in a moment, and said, in a voice that sounded almost as if it came from a light heart, "But I must not go thus, Caius, you know I must not go to Cesar, without having at least a garland on my head. Where is my pretty little Marcia? Stay there, Valerius, and I shall be ready anon—quite ready."

So saying, Athanasia glided away from me, and passed into an adjoining chamber, where I heard her saluted by the jailer's daughter, whom she desired (and she said it gayly too) to trim the lamp, and go fetch the flowers that had been placed in water in the morning. The little maiden sung cheerily, and seemed to be doing as she was bid, for I could not but hear distinctly whatever passed between them.

It seemed to me as if Athanasia were less hasty than she had promised, yet many minutes elapsed not ere she returned to me, and she brought the lamp, too, in her hand. "For why," said she, "should I dress myself only for little Marcia and this Trajan? Do you not see that I have been at pains with myself? and who, think ye, would throw so much trouble away? for, after all, perhaps Trajan may disdain to take notice how a poor girl who has renounced Venus, and blasphemed against the three Graces, may chance to be arrayed when she comes before him." She spoke all this, however, in mere mockery; for the truth is, that she had made no alteration whatever

in her dress, excepting only that garland of flowers which I had heard her bid the damsel prepare for her. She plucked one of the blossoms from her hair as she drew near to me, and said, "Take it, Valerius; you must not refuse me this one token more; and you must know this also is a sacred gift, Valerius, for the Christians love this flower, and cherish it on account of the symbols with which its fair leaves are set forth. Look you, Caius, you must learn never to look upon it without kissing these red streaks—these blessed streaks of the Christian flower."

I took the flower from her hand, and pressed it to my lips; and I remembered that the very first day I saw Athanasia she had plucked such a one, when apart from all the rest, in one of the dark mossy alleys of the gardens of Capito. I told her what I remembered; it seemed as if the little circumstance I had mentioned had called up, in painful vividness, all the image of peaceful days that had passed away, and promised not to be restored again; for she, who had hitherto borne herself so bravely, replied not to me now without a faltering voice, and once more the visible shade of sorrowfulness gathered like a cloud upon her countenance. If the tear was ready, however, it was not permitted to drop; and Athanasia returned again to the Christian flower with all the usual composure both of her countenance and of her voice.

"Do you think there are any of them in Britain?" said she; "or do you think they would grow there? You must try, Caius; you must not leave Rome without getting some of the roots. And stay, I should like you to get them where you first saw the flower. You must promise me—indeed you must—that you will go to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, Caius, or next day, or some day, at least, before you think of your departure. You must go to my dear uncle, and he will not refuse you, when you tell him that it is for my sake he is to give you some of the roots of those pretty flowers of his; for he has hundreds of them all down that old dark alley, where I have wandered so often and plucked them, when no one suspected why I never put rose-buds, nor violets, nor hyacinths, nor any other flower, but only this into my hair. They call it the passion-flower, Caius; 'tis an emblem of an awful

thing. Look you here, Caius, these purple streaks are like trickling drops of blood ; and here, look ye, they are all round the flower. Is it not very like a bloody crown upon a pale brow ? I will take one of them in my hand, too, Caius ; and methinks I shall not disgrace myself when I look upon it, even though Trajan should be frowning upon me."

I had not the heart to interrupt her ; but heard silently all she said, and I thought she said the words quickly and eagerly, as if she feared to be interrupted.

The old priest came into the chamber while she was yet speaking so, and said, very composedly, " Come, my dear child, our friend has sent again for us, and the soldiers have been waiting already some space, who are to convey us to the Palatine. Come, children, we must part for a moment—perhaps it may be but for a moment—and Valerius may remain here till we return to him. Here, at least, dear Caius, you shall have the earliest tidings and the surest. Yes, yes, you will stay—all will go well, and we shall be with you again anon."

In saying these words, the good old man took Athanasia by the hand, and she, smiling now at length more serenely than ever, said only, " Farewell, then, Caius, farewell for a little moment !" And so, drawing her veil over her face, she passed away from before me, giving, I think, more support to the ancient Aurelius than, in her turn, she received from him. I began to follow them, but the priest waved his hand as if to forbid me—the door closed after them, and I was left alone. The thought rushed through my mind, " I have seen her—perhaps I have seen her for the last time ;" and I felt it pierced my bosom like a sword. I stretched myself upon the couch where Athanasia had reposed—the couch where Athanasia had dreamed of me—where her sleeping lips had murmured my name. I threw myself upon the place where she had lain ; and I would fain have wept, but my throat was dry, and no tears would come.

CHAPTER XIII.

I KNOW not, my friends, how to proceed with the narrative of what followed. Thoughts, passions, fears, hopes, succeeding so rapidly, or rather interfused so intensely, give to that strange night, when I look back upon it through the long vista of threescore years, the likeness of some wild, incoherent, fantastic, agonizing dream. Much, without doubt, of what passed in my own mind I have forgotten; but it seems to me as if what I saw were still present in all the distinctiveness of reality before my eyes, as if my ears were yet ringing with the echo of the least whisper that I heard. That chamber in the Mammer-tine—how impossible is it for me to forget the image of that deserted chamber! Its walls are at this moment before me blazing with the reflection of torch-light; and then again, as I saw them when a few minutes had elapsed, all dim and shadowy—the stars shining feebly upon them from the twilight sky—every thing around lonely and silent as a wilderness, except the voice of Silo's little maiden, which once and again sent to my half-unconscious ear a faint and remote echo of innocent infantine lamentation. Whither she had gone to bewail the departure of Athanasia, I knew not; I heard the child singing in a low and melancholy strain; and I arose from the couch, for the calmness of grief had suddenly succeeded to its tumult, and slow softening tears at last bathed my cheeks, as I gazed forth upon the solemn heavens and the wide darkening plain.

"You are calm, sir," said the jailer, who had come into the chamber, and stood behind me for a moment or two ere I observed him, "you are calm, sir; I am happy to see that you are calm: the prison is now perfectly quiet; will you walk with me towards the Palatine, that we may at least be near to know what is reported of their

proceedings? My brother will stay here, and take care of my girl till my return."

"Oh! yes, Silo," said I; "for, at least, I shall be better anywhere than here, and I would fain be in the open air."

We soon had descended from the Capitoline, passed through the silent Forum, and gained the brow of the opposite eminence, where, as shortly before around the precincts of the Mammertine, all was light and tumult. Every court was guarded with mounted and dismounted soldiery, and groups of busy men were passing continually and repassing about the different gates and porticoes of the imperial edifice. We interchanged no words, but I followed the guidance of Silo, who led me round and round the guarded buildings, apparently endeavouring to discover some traces by which he might conjecture in what part of them the examination of the prisoners was going on.

At last he fixed his eyes upon a certain point, where a more considerable detachment of the Prætorians were stationed, and in the neighbourhood of which there was altogether a greater appearance of light and bustle than elsewhere.

"Do you think they are there?" said I. "Are you acquainted with the palace, Silo?"

He shook his head in answer. "Am I acquainted with the palace? Ah! sir, little do you know through what strange vicissitudes of fortune I have passed. You do not know more familiarly the house in which you were born and reared, than I do every corner—every dark corner within these wide walls. But I have not crossed the threshold since the day Cesar died."

"Which Cesar, Silo? Do you mean Nerva, or Domitian, or—"

"Domitian," he replied, "was my master. I was the slave of Domitian, and he gave me my freedom."

"And you were within the palace on that day, Silo?"

"Yes, sir; I was indeed within the palace. I would have given no little price to be without it. It is not for me to speak against the prince who freed me. He was kind to his household."

"Then no man, Silo, is altogether wicked. There was some redeeming thing even about Domitian."

"Yes, sir; and when he first came to be over all, all hoped fairly of him. But oh, sir! it is a terrible thing to be tried with the temptation of power. I have often thought with myself, that it is like being given up by God into the hands of a cruel demon, who, unless you make a glorious conquest, must have his own way in all things, and will render your human voice nothing but a poor mouthpiece for uttering the imaginations of hell. But then, to be sure, there is the more honour for him who overcomes; and I thought, till lately, that Trajan had been greatly strengthened. Now, however, you see that God permits even him, whom all call just, humane, and modest, to be blinded also for a time by this devil. I trust it shall not be ever so."

"Silo," said I, "you speak the truth, and you speak it strongly; I fear, indeed, it is a struggle out of which few hearts could come unmarred. It must indeed be a terrible temptation."

"And then again, sir," quoth he, "I sometimes think it may be compared to the influence of strong wine, which they say does not so much alter men from themselves as make visible what they really are; though they be at other times cunning enough to hide that from the eyes of the world. Perhaps it was so with my poor prince; but it is not for me to speak—no, nor is it for any one to speak *now*—for he has gone to render his account where alone there is just judgment. And speak of these matters how we may, there is at least enough to make one think modestly; for oh, sir! the heart of man is a dark thing to look into; and *One*, to whom I know you will yet cling steadfastly, has said, as perhaps you know already, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.'"

While we were talking thus, Silo all the time kept his eyes fixed, not upon the part of the palace which seemed to be most probably the scene of the examination, but upon a certain long range of building, in which, unlike the rest of the imperial pile, there was no semblance either of light or tumult of any kind. "Do you see," said he, observing that my eye followed his,—“do you take notice of the

silence and darkness that prevail all along here ? Well, it was not always thus, sir. I have seen the time when there was light enough here, and when the boldest eye in Rome did not look upon these arches without as much anxiety as either of us feels now."

"It was here," said I, "that Domitian lived. Is that your meaning ?"

"Yes, sir, it was indeed here ; and it was here, too, that he died ;" and he pointed with his finger to a certain point in the midst of this deserted wing of the palace, where I saw pillars of more than usual magnificence supporting what seemed to be the roof of an open gallery. He paused for a moment, and then said, as if something had suddenly occurred to him, "Will you wait for me here, sir ? I must run back to the prison. I must go ; but I shall be back again on the instant."

"If it must be so," said I, "go, Silo, and I shall wait for you patiently. Alas ! what avails it where we be ? It is not with us, Silo, to contend against the demon of whom we were speaking."

"Nay, sir," he replied, "do not speak so dejectedly so long as hope is not extinguished. I shall be with you again anon."

The jailer left me, not without some little wonder that he should have done so at such a moment. But the things he had been saying had, I know not how, tended in some sort to tranquillize me ; or perhaps it might be that, under the shade of those massive walls which had witnessed so many scenes of guilt and blood, and the luxury and the misery of tyrants, a kind of deadening feeling of the presence of Necessity, and the fruitlessness of Endeavour, and of the vanity of all human things, good and evil, had been breathed upon me, as it were, by the stern Genius of the place. I made no effort to seek for any intelligence—I never even thought of seeking out Sabinus, although I knew he must be somewhere at no great distance from where I was. I sat down, half in despair, half in resignation, at the foot of one of the brazen statues that were in the midst of the palace-court. I read the inscription upon its base, and found that I had taken my station beneath the image of that proud man who had already transmitted his name to

twelve succeeding masters of the world—that great Julius, who first drank the full cup of ambition, and found its dregs bitter. I sat there silent and solitary, beneath that memorial of departed grandeur, contemplating by turns, and in a mood that almost approached to indifference, the deserted scene of the pleasures, and the crimes, and the sufferings of Domitian, on the one hand—the gorgeous chambers of the magnificent Trajan on the other—the array of the imperial soldiers keeping watch at the busy palace-gate—and the shadow of Cesar's statue, which lay far out beyond me upon the pavement of the court.

In a word, I had scarcely once reflected upon Silo's leaving me ere he returned, having evidently in much haste performed his errand (whatever that might have been) to the Mammertine. "Valerius," said he, "you will at least pardon my absence when you know what was my intention. I suspected, when I saw where the chief guard was stationed, and I have since ascertained from one of the servants of Trajan, that the council is this night sitting in a chamber wherein I have witnessed many strange scenes, such as neither you, nor perhaps any man that is at this moment within the bounds of the Palatine, have the least conception of. Behold this key. I had preserved it by mere accident; but, if you have courage to follow my guidance, I think you will soon confess that the accident was not an unfortunate one."

I could not, for my life, imagine to what the words of Silo tended; but, as I have said already, I had fallen into a mood in which all things seemed almost alike, and I mechanically, rather than upon any course of reflection, signified my readiness to attend the jailer whithersoever it might please him to lead me. He looked cautiously around the court for a moment or two, and then, wrapping his gown closely about him; stepped very quietly towards the termination of the abandoned wing. I moved along with him. We entered beneath a small portico, beside the very threshold of which the grass was everywhere peeping through between the stones of the pavement; the key was applied to the gate, and the rusty lock, after one or two trials, yielded to its pressure; a large

empty hall received us, the circumference of which was scarcely visible by the dim light of the newly-risen moon, streaming down from a cupola, which hung far above, open to the sky. The door was hastily closed behind us, and we heard our whispers and our footsteps echoed with a strange distinctness, from the dark high arches around us, as we stepped into the centre of the long-deserted saloon. "Hush, hush!" said Silo, "I am sure there must be some one within hearing;" and at that moment a whole brood of swallows whirred close past us, and, circling and re-circling the lofty walls, the startled tenants of the place escaped from the presence of the intruders into the open air overhead.

Silo gazed for a moment after them, and threw open—for no key was necessary—the folding-doors of the first of a long range of chambers which opened upon the saloon. To this the beams of the moon had more access, and their light gleamed broadly here and there upon the heavy hangings of cloth of gold, and showed, at the same time, the long trailing spiders' webs, which had been woven upon their surface, all down from the cornices; but the windows through which the light found admittance had been long closed upon the air, and there was a feeling of weight and oppression about all the atmosphere of the room. The carpetings lay thick upon the floor, and we glided over them without disturbing the silence.

Another and another chamber we in like manner traversed in succession—all of them equally filled with the signs of magnificence. But at length we came to one much longer than any of these, and furnished in quite a different manner; for when first its door was opened, there was so much light reflected on every side, that I started, and could not help thinking we had intruded farther than Silo had intended. A second glance, however, seemed to indicate that we were still in the region of desolation, for a statue lay in the midst of the floor, one of its limbs snapped over, as if it had fallen and been permitted to remain. A table, however, stood not far from the statue, covered with vessels of silver and of porcelain, and it was not till I had come close up to it that I saw the dust lying thick upon these, and observed how much the

lustre of them had been tarnished. Silo, in the mean time, continued, as if riveted to the spot, in the middle of the room, close by the fallen statue, the shattered fragments of which he was, or seemed to be, contemplating.

"Where are we, Silo?" I whispered, "what place is this? what means the unnatural light that beams from the walls about us? and what, above all, betoken these strange relics, surrounded with so many symptoms of confusion?"

"Oh, sir!" he replied, "did you never hear men speak of the famous Phrygite walls? I thought all the world had heard of this place."

"I never heard of it," said I, "nor do I know the meaning of what you say."

"Then listen, listen, sir," he whispered, "and I will tell you what I thought all men had heard of. This is the place in which alone Domitian used to eat and sleep, and walk about for the last months of his life, when he was jealous of all men who came near him; and he contrived these walls, covered all over with the shining Ethiopian stone, that no one might be able to approach him without being discovered. The time that has passed since those days has somewhat dimmed their brightness; but then, sir, I promise you there was not a bit of all these walls of which the finest dame in Rome might not have been glad to make her mirror. I swear to you, sir, it was a strange sight to see how, even when a slave entered with a goblet of wine in his hand, the poor prince would start and stare around him, as if every side of the chamber had been invaded by some host of men; and yet, perhaps, it was all the while nothing more than fifty different reflections of one trembling eunuch. Alas! sir, as I said to you before, it is a fearful thing to be a tyrant. I am sure there was never a boy in all the house who would have changed pillows any night in all that year with Cesar; for it was visible to the least of us, that a whisper or a shadow was enough to discompose his countenance in the midst of all this grandeur."

"And where, Silo, did he fall?"

The jailer pointed with his finger to the broken statue,—"And look, look here, sir," he said, "look upon this shat-

tered piece of marble—it was behind this that they say he ran for safety, when he had felt the first treacherous blow ; but I came not into the chamber till all had long been over, and I saw nothing but the blood upon the floor, and the statue lying here just as it does at present. Look, yonder in the corner is the couch he slept upon, and he had always a dagger under his head ; and he called to the little page who was waiting upon him to fetch it from the place ; but they had taken away the blade, and the scabbard only remained ; and then in came Parthenius and Claudianus, and the gladiator, and all the rest, and he could make no resistance ; and they soon finished what the cunning Stephanus had begun. But oh, sir ! we have seen enough of this terrible chamber ; let us go on, for we have not yet reached the place to which I wished to bring you ; but it is not far off now.”

With this Silo walked to the end of the melancholy chamber, and pressing upon a secret spring, where no door was apparent, opened the way into a room darker and smaller than any of those through which we had come. He then said to me, “ Now, sir, you must not venture upon one whisper more—you touch on the very heart of Domitian’s privacy. It is possible that the place I have been leading you to may have been shut up—it may exist no longer ; but the state in which all things are found here makes me think it more likely that Trajan has never been master of its secret. And in that case, we shall be able both to see and to hear, without being either seen or heard, exactly as Domitian used to do, when there was any council held either in the Mars or the Apollo.”

I started at the boldness of the project, which now, for the first time, I understood ; but we had come a long way, and I was in no mood for hesitation.

Silo laid his finger on his lips again and again as he looked to me,—very cautiously lifted up a piece of the dark-red cloth with which this chamber was hung,—and essayed another secret spring, which commanded a very small and narrow door in the panelling beneath. Total darkness appeared to be beyond ; but the jailer, motioning to me to remain for a moment where I was, and to keep up the hanging, glided boldly into the recess. I won-

dered how he should tread so lightly, that I could not perceive the least echo of his footsteps ; but this no longer surprised me, when I myself had been permitted to follow him, which, after being absent for several moments, he, appearing again at the entrance, and silently beckoning with his finger, invited me to do.

I found myself in a very narrow place, the floor of which felt beneath my foot as if it were stuffed like a pillow ; and, after we had dropped the hanging of the adjoining chamber, every thing was totally dark, as it had at first appeared to me, except only at two points at some distance above my head, and considerably separated the one from the other, where, through divers small apertures, each about the size, it may be, of a human eye, there was a visible ray of light, manifestly artificial. Silo, taking hold of me by the hand, conducted me up some steps towards the nearest of these places ; and, as I approached it, I heard distinctly the voices of persons talking together in the room from which the light must needs be proceeding. I did not draw my breath, you may well believe me, with much boldness at that moment ; but my eye was soon fixed at one of the apertures, and, after the first dazzle was over, I saw clearly, for my position was close by one of its angles, the whole interior of the illuminated chamber beyond me. Silo took his station close by my side, and locking his arm in mine, gazed as earnestly as I did through another of these loop-holes, which, that you may understand every thing about it, were evidently quite concealed among the rich carved work of the ivory cornice.

The chamber was lighted up splendidly by three tall candelabra of silver, close beside one of which was placed a long table covered with an infinity of scrolls and tablets. One person, who had his back turned towards us, was writing at this table, and two others, in one of whom I instantly recognised the emperor himself, were walking up and down on the other side, and conversing together as they walked.

"No, Palma," said Trajan, for it was that old favourite whom he addressed, "I have quite made up my mind as to this matter. I shall never, so long as I live, permit

any curious inquisition to be carried on concerning the private opinions of any man. Every man has a right, without question, to think—to believe—exactly what pleases him; and I shall concede as much in favour of every woman, Palma, if you will have it so. But it is totally a different affair, when the fact, no matter how, is forced upon my knowledge, that a subject, no matter who or what he be—a subject of the Roman empire, refuses to comply with the first, the elemental, and the most essential of all the laws by which the state is regulated. The man—ay, or the woman—who confesses in my presence contempt for the deities whom the commonwealth acknowledges in every step of its procedure—that person is a criminal; and I cannot dismiss him unpunished, without injuring the commonwealth by the display of weakness in its chief. As for these poor fanatics themselves, you do not suppose that I authorize their punishment without the same feelings of compassion which you yourself express? but it is the penalty of my station that I must control my feelings, and you well know it is not on such occasions as this alone that I essay to control them.”

“But you are satisfied, my lord,” said Palma, “that these people are really quite innocent as to Cotilius’s designs; and as it was upon that suspicion they were apprehended, perhaps it may be possible—”

“Possible! yes, Palma,” interrupted the prince, “quite possible and quite easy, too, provided they will condescend to save themselves by the most trivial acknowledgment of the sort, which, I repeat to you, I do and must consider as absolutely necessary. And women, too—and girls forsooth—I suppose you would have me wait till the very urchins on the street were gathering into knots to discuss the nature of the gods! Do you remember what Plato says?”

“No, my lord, I do not know to what you refer.”

“Why, Plato says, that nobody can ever understand any thing accurately about the Deity, and that, if he could, he would have no right to communicate his discoveries to others; the passage is in the *Timæus*, man, and Cicero has translated it besides. And is it to be

endured that these modern fanatics are to do every hour what the Platoes and the Ciceroes spoke of in such terms as these? Why, really, I think you carry your tolerance a little further than might have been expected from such a devout disciple of the Academy."

"I despise them, my lord, as much as yourself; but, to tell you the truth, it is this young lady that moves me to speak thus, and I crave your pardon if I have spoken with too much freedom. Her father was one of the best soldiers Titus had."

"The more is the pity, Palma. Have you ever seen the girl yourself? Did you give orders that she should be brought hither? I have not the least objection that you should have half an hour, ay, or an hour, if you will, to talk with her quietly; perhaps your eloquence may have all the effect we desire."

"I doubt it, my lord, I greatly doubt it," he replied; "but, indeed, I know not whether she be yet here.—Did you not send to the Mammertine?"

The man writing at the table, to whom this last interrogation was addressed, said, "I believe, sir, both this lady and the old man, who was in the same prison, are now in attendance." And upon this Trajan and Palma retired together towards the farther end of the apartment, where they conversed for some minutes in a tone so low that I could not understand any thing of what was said. Trajan at length turned from his favourite with an air, as I thought, of some little displeasure, and said aloud, coming back into the middle of the room, "I know perfectly well it is so, Palma; but what is that to the affair in hand? I am very sorry for the Sempronii, but I doubt if even they would be so unreasonable as you are."

"Will you not see the poor girl yourself, Cesar?" said the favourite.

"Cornelius Palma," replied the prince, "you do not need to be told, that my seeing her would only make it more difficult for me to do that which, seeing or not seeing her, I know to be my duty. Do you accept of my proposal? Are you willing to try the effect of your own persuasion? I promise you, if you succeed, I shall rejoice even more heartily than yourself; but it is rather

too much to imagine that I am personally to interfere about such an affair as this—an affair which, the more I think of it, seems to me to be the more perfectly contemptible. Nay, do not suppose it is this poor girl I am talking of—I mean the whole of this Jewish, this Christian affair, which does indeed appear to me to be the most barefaced absurdity that ever was permitted to disturb the tranquillity of a great empire. Think of it, I pray you, but for a single moment. A mean and savage nation of barbarians have but just suffered the penalty of obstinacy and treachery alike unequalled, and from them—from the scattered embers of this extinguished fire, we are to allow a new flame to be kindled, ay, and that in the very centre of Rome—here—where I speak to you—within sight of my palace! I tell you, that if my own hand were to be scorched in the cause, I would disperse this combustion to the winds of heaven; I tell you, that I stand here Cesar in the midst of Rome, and that I would rather be chained to the oar, Palma, or whipped for a slave, than suffer, while the power to prevent it is mine, the least, the tiniest speck to be thrown upon the face of the Roman majesty. By all the gods, Palma, it is enough to make a man sick to think of the madness that is in this world, and of the iron arguments by which we are compelled to keep those from harming us who at first sight of them excite no feeling but our pity. I am weary of these very names of Palestine—Jew—Christian; and, by Jupiter, I must have my ears rid of them. Go to this foolish girl, and try what you can make of her; but I give you fair warning, that I will have Rome troubled with no breeders of young Christians.”

Trajan whispered something further into the ear of Palma, and then lifting up one of the books that lay upon the table, retired with it from the chamber, passing, as it seemed, yet farther into the interior of the palace.

Cornelius Palma, after the prince was gone, sat down over-against the person who was by the writing-table, and leaning with his hand upon his brow, was apparently for some space busied with his reflections upon what he had heard. He then talked in a low and whispering

manner with the secretary (for such I supposed him to be) of Trajan ; but I could catch only a few words, sufficient to indicate that the same affair was still the subject of discussion. The end of it was, that the secretary pointed to a door opposite to that by which his master had departed, and that Palma walked towards it as if about to enter the adjoining chamber. But the moment Silo perceived this, he pulled me by the hand, and, in a word, he soon conducted me to the other end of this closet, where, as I have told you already, the light appeared to find admittance in a similar manner. From that corner another of the imperial apartments was visible in equal distinctness, and the first glance showed me Athanasia and her ancient friend, sitting there quietly together, as if waiting now at length, in entire composure, the moment when they should be summoned into the presence of their judge. The door of the room was opened almost at the same time by the soldier who guarded it, and Palma entered, with an air which might not, perhaps, appear the less alarming because of its extreme gravity and calmness. The old man and Athanasia both arose to salute him, and he, courteously returning their salutation, beckoned to them both that they should sit down again. He himself leaned his elbow upon the pedestal of one of the busts that were ranged about the apartment, and, after pausing so for some moments, desired the attendant soldier to withdraw for a little, as he had something to say in private to the prisoners.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE soldier had withdrawn himself for some moments ere Palma spoke ; and it was evident, from the manner in which he, during this interval, regarded Athanasia, how much he was affected by seeing one so fair, and so young, and so noble, bound with the fetters and expect-

ing the fate of guilt. As for Aurelius, the senator scarcely once looked upon him, and I thought when he did so that there was not only indifference, but something very like distrust and displeasure in his glance. It was to the old man, nevertheless, that his first words were addressed. "From what has just been reported to me," he said, "of your behaviour at the execution of the traitor Cotilius, I fear there is nothing to be gained by speaking to *you* concerning the only means by which your own safety can yet be secured. You are obstinate, old man, in your superstitions. I see by your looks that there is no chance of persuading you."

"Noble Palma," replied the priest, "contempt is the only thing I fear from men. But I thank my God that it is the only thing I have it in my power to avoid."

"I will not argue with you," answered Palma. "It was not with any purpose of bending you that I undertook this painful office. I pray you to leave us for a moment, that I may speak in freedom with one whose case is, I trust, less hopeless."

The old priest rose up, and pointed to the fetters that were upon his arms, and said meekly, "I resist in nothing—let them guard me whither it pleases you."

"Sir," said Athanasia, "I pray you let Aurelius remain; you are much in the wrong, if you imagine that I shall either hear or answer less freely because of my friend being present."

"He will, at least, retire to the other end of the chamber," said Palma; "and remember, that it is not his part to interfere any further."

The priest retired as he was bidden, and sat down at a considerable distance, with his arms folded upon his breast, and his eyes fixed upon Athanasia. She, on her part, seeing that Palma hesitated, and seemed at a loss how to begin, said to him, in a tone of modest composure, "Noble sir, believe that I am most sensible to the kindness of your meaning; but if your purpose be indeed as kind as I think it is, I pray you spare me at least the pain that is needless—and spare yourself what I am sure is painful to you. You see my youth and my sex, and it is not unnatural for you to think as you

do ; but know that my faith is fixed, and that I hope I shall not be deserted, when I strive even at the last moment to do it no dishonour."

"This old man," said Palma, "has made you, then, thoroughly a Christian?"

"I would it were so," she answered—"I would to God it were so!"

"The prince," resumed Palma, "has knowledge both of your father's character, and of the race from which you are sprung, and of the goodness of your own heart, young lady ; and I tell you, that if you persist in this manner, you will give pain, much pain, to more than you have yet thought of—to me, lady—nay, to Trajan himself ;—and as for your family, have you yet seriously considered into what misery they must be plunged?"

"Oh, sir," she replied, "you mean kindly ; but this is cruel, cruel kindness. I have considered all things. God knows I have considered well. I have wept, I have prayed ; but, I thank God, I have as yet been sustained, and I trust I shall be so yet further."

"Lady," answered Palma, "the touch of the physician's knife is painful, yet his hand must not falter ; nor must I shrink from speaking to you. But I have sent for those who, I hope, may speak yet more effectually." So saying, the senator turned from the place where he had been leaning himself, manifestly much shaken by the behaviour of the maiden. He walked to the other end of the chamber, over-against where Aurelius was sitting, and, opening the door, said something which I heard not to the soldier, who watched there. He then went and sat down also in a corner of the room ; while Athanasia, having risen up, stood trembling, being much agitated, as was evident, with the expectation of an interview, whose nature, without question, she already in some measure suspected.

Her eye was fixed upon the open door of the chamber ; and after a moment had elapsed, there entered, even as I had anticipated, both her uncles, Lucius and Velius. Behind them came, wrapped all over in her consecrated veil, the stately priestess of Apollo ; and last of all

gazing wildly and distractedly around, her eyes red with weeping, and all her apparel disordered, the friend of her youth, and the sister of her bosom,—she to whom, in all things save one, her heart had ever been laid open—the beautiful and the miserable Sempronia. The two Sempronii advanced with calm steps, deeply dejected, towards the place where Athanasia stood waiting their approach, as if rooted to the ground. The priestess walked yet more slowly, and lifted, as she walked, the veil from off her face, which was pale, but quite unmoved, so that I knew not well how to interpret its meaning. But as for poor young Sempronia, when she at last rested her eye upon her friend, and saw the fettered hands, that were clasped together, as if in agony, upon her bosom, she, poor thing, screamed aloud, dashed the blinding tears from her eyelids, rushed past them all, and was folded at once in the cold embrace of Athanasia—I say, her cold embrace, for, although I saw that she pressed her cousin to her bosom, I saw also that she trembled from head to foot, and that her pale face and dilated eyes were still turned, as if she had no power to take them away, upon those who approached towards her, with steps so much more slow, and with seriousness so much more terrible, at such a moment, even than all the passion of young Sempronia's sympathy.

“My dear Athanasia,” said Lucius, taking her by the hand, “you must not look upon us thus—you cannot think that we are come with any thought of giving you unnecessary pain. We come to you as to a daughter—we think you have done wrong, but we have not forgotten the days that are past.”

“My poor girl,” said old Velius, “listen to Lucius, listen to your best friends. Do you put more faith in the words of strangers than in the blood of kindred—the affection of your father's brothers—the guardians of his dear orphan?”

“Wo is me!” said Athanasia—“O God, strengthen me! Why, oh! why am I forced to wound these kind hearts! Have pity upon me, have pity upon me—you know not what you speak of, else you would all be silent.”

"Weep," said the priestess; "yes, weep, and weep largely. There is yet time for you to repent: abjure this madness; come, come, and let the last of your tears be shed upon the altars of your paternal gods, and they also will be merciful. Nay, tremble not when you hear my voice, Athanasia. I love you as tenderly as the rest; and if you have deceived me also, I pardon you—I have long since pardoned you."

And the priestess stooped where she stood, and imprinted a silent kiss upon the forehead of the victim; but she could not stop her tears, which flowed, indeed, like waters from a fountain, all down her marble cheeks, and upon the naked shoulders of young Sempronia, who also still clung around her vehemently—seeing and hearing nothing—inconsolable in anguish.

Athanasia bowed her head, and wept at length audibly, for hitherto her grief had been silent. For a moment or two she wept so, and no one said any thing to interrupt the wholesome relief of nature. But the maiden soon recovered herself, and gently removing the arms of Sempronia, stood erect once more, and calm in the midst of her relations.

"My friends," said she, "you have seen that I do not bear this lightly. But it cannot last for ever. The moments you have to be with me are, without doubt, numbered, and what avails it that they should be spent in speaking and in hearing words that can have no effect? I am a Christian—I have been baptized in the name of Christ—I have partaken of the symbols of the Christian mystery—and I have no more power to bring myself out of this peril than he who stands in the front rank—without sword or buckler—deprived of all things but his honour."

"Athanasia," said Velius, "alas! my dear girl, what madness is this that has taken possession of your bosom? Do you hold yourself wiser than all the wise men, and all the good, and all the great men that have ever lived in Rome? Do you deem yourself able to penetrate mysteries from which all the sages of the earth have retreated with reverent humility? Consider with yourself once more, I pray you, and remember the

modesty that might be becoming in your tender years—and, I must speak the truth, your ignorance.”

“Oh, sir!” she answered, “little, little do you know my heart, if you think that I have been brought into this place because of my being puffed up with any emptiness of conceit. I know well that I am a poor, young, unlearned creature: but God gives not according to our deserts; and because I am poor and ignorant, must I therefore reject the promise of his riches, and the great light that has been manifested to me, which, would to God it had also been to you, despite the perils which a dark world has thrown around it.”

“O, Athanasia!” said young Sempronia, now for the first time opening her lips, “I know the secrets of your heart, although you have kept from me some of them. Oh think, my dear sister, of all the love that we bear to you—and, oh! think of Valerius—for I know he is dear to your thoughts—I know you love him.”

“The more is the sacrifice,” said Athanasia. “I do love Valerius; but he also is a Christian—at least I hope in God he will soon be so.”

“Amen! amen!” said the old man, who had hitherto been silent.

The priestess turned round when she heard him speaking, and observing that he also was fettered, and the great steadfastness which was upon his countenance, her sorrow seemed instantly to give place to anger, and she began to reproach the old man bitterly, even as if he alone were to blame for all the danger of Athanasia, and for all the affliction of her kindred.

“Behold,” said she, “old man—behold the end of your work. Look here, and see to what you have conducted the disciple of your phrensy. Your hairs are gray, your eyes are dim, and your feeble clay is already yearning, it may be, to be sprinkled into ashes. But look here, cruel, bloody, ruthless apostate! look here, and behold what a victim you have bound along with you to the altar of your madness. Oh! may the gods that see all things look into your wicked heart, and have pity and mercy upon the errors of youth—of deceived, ensnared, abused, slaughtered, murdered youth.

Oh ! yes, old and feeble though you be, may strength be given to you in anger, that you may taste the full struggle and the true agony. May you be strong to wrestle, that you may fall slowly, and feel your fall ! Would to the gods, just and merciful, that you might struggle and fall alone !”

The old man arose from his seat when he heard himself thus addressed, and answered calmly, although the fire was kindled in his eye, and his cheek was no longer coloured with the paleness of extenuated age. “Amen ! lady,” he said ; “most surely your last wish is mine. But why is it that you have come hither with cruel words, to imbitter equally the last moments of a life that is dear to you, and a life that you despise ? Go, leave us where we are ; we ask not for your pity, and you have no right to come hither to wound us with your contempt. You speak of ignorance and of deceit. O, little do you know who it is that is ignorant, and who it is that is deceived. We are the servants of the living God, whose light, in spite of all the powers of earth and of hell, will soon shine abroad among the nations, and quench in utter oblivion the feeble, false, glimmering tapers, fashioned with the hands of men, with which hitherto ye have sat contented amid the darkness, and blessed yourselves as the favoured of the earth. Yes, man may bind with chains, and slay with the sword—but think ye that the spirit is his to do with it what he will ? or think ye, in your vanity, that the chain, and the dungeon, and the sword of man can alter the course of things that are to be, or shake from its purpose the will of Him in whom, blind and ignorant, ye refuse to behold the image of the Maker of all things—shutting eyes, and ears, and your proud hearts, and blaspheming against the God of heaven, whose glory ye ascribe to stocks and stones, and to the ghosts of wicked and bloody tyrants, long since mouldered into dust ; and to the sun, and the moon, and the beautiful stars of the sky, which God set there to rule the day and the night, even as he lets loose the wind, to scatter the leaves of the forest, and to lift up the waves of the great deep, and send them roaring upon the land ?

Leave us, I charge you. The young and the old are alike steadfast, for God is our strength, and he bestows it on them that ask for it in the name of the Redeemer."

"Peace, blasphemer!" said the priestess; "I serve the altar, and came not hither to hear the gods of heaven and earth insulted by the lips of old and hardened impiety. Once more, Athanasia, will you speak the word and go with us, or will you stay here and partake the fate of this madman?"

"Oh, God!" said the maiden, "how shall I speak that they may at length hear me! My dear friends—my dear, dear friends—if you have any love, any compassion, I pray you kiss me once, and bid me farewell kindly, and lay my ashes—when I am no more—in the sepulchre of my father—beside the urn of my dear mother. I tell you truly, you need not fear that I will disturb the repose of the place—I tell you most truly that I die not in anger against any one, and that I shall have rest at length when I am relieved from this struggle. Oh! pardon me, if in any thing besides this I ever gave you pain—remember none of my offences but this—think of me kindly. And go now, my dear friends, kiss me once each of you; kiss my lips in love, and leave me to bear that which must be borne, since there is no escape from it but in lying, and in baseness, and in utter perdition here and hereafter. May the Lord strengthen his day soon, and may ye all bless the full daylight, although now ye are startled by the troubled redness of the dawn! Farewell—kiss me, Velius—kiss me, Lucius—my aunt also will kiss me, for she loves me too, in spite of all things."

They did kiss her, and tears were mingled with their embraces, and they said no more, but parted from her where she was; and Palma, the senator, lifted the desolate Sempronia from the ground, on which she had fallen, and he and her father carried her away, apparently quite senseless, with all her black tresses sweeping the pavement as they moved. And so Athanasia and Aurelius were once more left alone in the chamber.

They were alone—and they were close together, for the old man hastened to Athanasia the moment the

others had left her. "The moment is come," said Silo; "now, now, at last, sir, prepare yourself to risk every thing where every thing may be gained."

He did not whisper this, but spake the words boldly and aloud; and ere I could either answer any thing, or form any guess as to his meaning, he had leaped down from my side, and thrown open, by touching another secret spring, a door which formed a communication (of course entirely unsuspected) between our lurking-place and the chamber in which our friends were standing. Silo rushed in, and I followed him. It was all done so rapidly that I scarce remember how it was done. I cannot, indeed, forget the wild and vacant stare of Athanasia, the cry which escaped from her lips, nor the fervour with which she sunk into my embrace. But all the rest is like a dream to me. The door closed swiftly behind us; swiftly—swiftly I ran, bearing the maiden in my arms, through all the long course of those deserted chambers. Door after door flew open before us. All alike breathless and speechless, we ran on. We reached the last of the chambers, the wide and echoing saloon, ere my heart had recovered from the first palpitation of surprise; and a moment after we breathed once more the free air of heaven, beneath the pillars of the portico.

"Stop not," said I; "for the sake of God, stop not. Hasten, Silo; it is you that must guide us."

"Ha!" said he, "already have they perceived it! Great God! after all, is it in vain!" He paused as he said so, and we heard distinctly voice echoing voice, and the clapping of doors. "Treachery, treachery! Escape, escape!" they shouted at the gates; and horn and trumpet mingled in the clamour of surprise, wrath, terror.

"Ride, ride," screamed a voice high over all the tumult—"ride, ride this instant, and guard every avenue."

"Search every corner—search the wing of Domitian," cried another.

The horsemen galloped furiously hither and thither across the courts; trumpet, and horn, and cymbal re-

sounded above the shouting of men, and the neighing of the startled chargers.

"We are lost—we are lost!" said Silo, clasping his hands upon his brow. "We shall never reach the gate, and they must discover every thing on the instant."

"Let us run to the temple of Apollo," said I—strange to tell, I felt comparatively cool at that moment; "the priestess will at least give shelter to Athanasia—we at least must try her."

"Thank God," whispered Silo, "there is one chance more." And so we began again to run as swiftly as before, and keeping close beneath the shaded wall of the edifice, and then threading, under the guidance of the jailer, many narrow passages of the hanging-gardens of Adonis, we reached, indeed, the adjoining court of the Palatine, and stood, where all was as yet silent and undisturbed, within the broad shadow of the sacred portico. The great gate we tried to open, but it was barred. Athanasia, however, who by this time had recovered herself astonishingly, pointed out a postern at the corner of the portico, and by that we, without further difficulty, gained the interior of the temple.

It was all filled as before (for here the alternations of the day and night made no difference), with the soft and beautiful radiance proceeding from the tree of lamps. But the fire on the altar of the god burned high and clear, as if very recently trimmed, and behind its blaze stood one of the ministering damsels, whom I had formerly seen embroidering in company with Athanasia. Her hand held the chain of the censer, and she was swinging it slowly from side to side, while the clouds of fragrant smoke rolled high up above the piercing flames;—and the near light, and the intervening smoke, and the occupation with which she was busied, prevented her from at first perceiving what intrusion had been made on the solitude of the sacred place. Athanasia ran up to her, and clasping the knees of the astonished girl with her fettered hands, began to implore her by the memory of old affection and companionship, and for the sake of all that was dear to her, to give escape, if escape were possible,—at least to give concealment. The girl dropped the cen-

ser from her hand—she gazed wildly, and stammered incoherently, and seemed to be utterly confused, and unable to guess what was the meaning of what she saw and heard.

“Lady!” said Silo, rushing forward, and falling down before her by the side of Athanasia; “oh, lady! stand not here considering, for this is the very moment of utmost peril for her—for us—for all of us. For the sake of all that is dear and holy, if you have access to any secret place, lay it open speedily, and the prayers of all that you behold shall for ever be calling down blessings on your head. Behold these fetters—they tell you from what her flight hath been.”

The girl grasped the hands of Athanasia, and gazed upon the manacles, but still seemed quite amazed and stupified; and while she was yet standing so, and Silo was renewing his entreaties, we heard suddenly some one trying to open the door by which we had entered, and which the jailer had fastened behind us, as soon as we had all crossed the threshold. Once and again a violent hand essayed to undo the bolt, and then all was quiet again. And in a moment after, the great gate of the temple was itself thrown open, and the priestess of Apollo entered the fane, followed by her two brothers, who supported between them the yet faint and weeping young Sempronia. In a moment Athanasia had rushed across the temple, and, strong in the mingled energy of hope and fear, knelt down with her forehead to the ground, her hands clasped together, and her long hair kissing the marble close by where the feet of her haughty kinswoman were planted.

Surprise held every one dumb for an instant; but it was the priestess who first broke the silence.

“Athanasia!” said she; “rash, unhappy girl, speak, by what magic do I behold you here? How have you escaped? and why, having done so, do you choose this place for your retreat? Think ye, that here, in the temple of Apollo, the priestess of an insulted god can give shelter to blasphemy flying from the arms of justice? Ha! and he, too, is here! Old man, what brought thee hither? I think our acquaintance scarce warranted this intrusion. Speak—speak, unhappy girl, and let me ur

derstand what all this means ; for at present every thing is dark, and I see only that you have brought hither—”

“ Friends, friends—oh ! blame them not,” interrupted the maiden, “ oh ! blame them not for doing much—for venturing all to save me. Oh ! help us, and help speedily ; for they search everywhere, and they will come hither, too, anon.”

“ Come hither !” cried the priestess ; “ who, I pray you, will come hither ? Ha ! run, fly, bolt the door. If Cesar speaks, I will answer ; but at no lower bidding shall I unfold the temple-gate. Ha ! methinks you imagine every one may be as venturous and as successful as yourself.”

The gate, meantime, had been made fast, and it was well that it had been so ; for scarcely had the priestess made an end of speaking, ere the sound of horses’ feet, and the ringing of arms, and the voices of angry men, were heard distinctly approaching towards us. In a moment more we could hear them talking together beneath the very portico, and trying, in their turn, to thrust open the massive valves of the temple.

“ Who calls there ?” cried the priestess, in a stern tone—“ Who calls and knocks there ? If a suppliant approaches, I think he might approach more modestly.”

“ Castor !—We are no suppliants,” answered a rough voice from without ; “ but you had better open your door, old dame, and let us see whether the rats have not got to their holes here. It is no use speaking ; if you have had them baked into a pie, we must see them. Dead or alive, you must give up our pretty Christians. Come, come, my sly masters ; yield, yield, there is no flying from Cesar.”

“ Peace, insolents !” quoth the priestess ; “ peace, and begone on the instant ! This is the temple of Apollo, and ye shall find no Christians here, I warrant you.”

The man still thundered at the door, however, and she resumed more sternly than ever,—“ Wretch, profane outcast, I charge thee once more, be still ! Has impiety crept even to the camp ? Turn, rude man, and dread the arm that guarded Delphos !”—and saying so, she at length lifted up the fearful Athanasia, and walked, all present

following at some little distance, towards the other extremity of the fane, where, as I had occasion once to tell you before, the private chamber of the priestess was situated on the right-hand beyond the statue of Apollo. In passing, she stopped for an instant, and, kissing the feet of the statue, seemed to murmur some secret invocation for help—perhaps it might be for pardon. She kept hold of Athanasia's hand all the while, but said not one word either to her or to any of us ; while the two uncles and the young Sempronia appeared to be still kept silent by the surprise with which all these unforeseen things had affected them.

She led us across the chamber in which, on a former day, I had heard Athanasia sing ; and in like manner, having taken a lamp in her hand, on through the long passages which conduct towards the receptacle wherein the Sibylline prophecies are said to be preserved. She opened the door, which she had, on that former day, told me led into the repository of those mysterious scrolls. Two inner doors appeared before us ; that to the left she opened likewise, and we perceived, descending from its threshold, a long dark flight of steps, as if going down into the centre of the rock. " Here," said she, as she paused, and held the lamp over the gloomy perspective, " here, at last, I leave you, having already done too much, whether I think of the god I serve, or of Trajan, or of myself. But for the blood of kindred not little may be dared. Go with her, since you have come with her—more I cannot do—here, take this lamp—the door at the bottom is fastened only from within ; let it fall behind you, and make what speed you may."

" One thing," said Silo, " had better be done ere you depart ;" and so, very adroitly, he, by means of his jailer's key, relieved both of them from their fetters. He then turned to me, and said, " Go no farther, Valerius ; you may rest assured that no one suspects us."

I saw that he designed to return into the courts of the Palatine, and so proceed homeward, as if ignorant of every thing that had occurred : I saw this ; and it was evident that Silo had no other course to pursue, either in duty to himself or to his family. But for me, all my cares

were here. I squeezed by the hand both Lucius and Velius, and both warmly returned my pressure. The priestess gave the lamp into my hand, and the door was shut upon us ; and we began, with hearts full of thankfulness—but not yet composed enough to taste of lightness—with thankfulness uppermost, I think, in our confused thoughts, and with no steady footsteps, to descend into the unknown abyss, that yawned black and deep before us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE steps were abrupt and narrow, but in a few minutes our feet became accustomed to them, and we descended rapidly. After we had done so for some time, we found ourselves in a low chamber of oblong form, in the midst of which an iron stake was fixed into the floor, having chains of ponderous workmanship attached to its centre, and over-against it, on the one side, a narrow chair of the same metal, and it also immoveable. I asked Athanasia to repose herself here for a moment ; for it was evident that the tumultuous evening had much worn out her strength. But she said, shuddering, “ No, no, not here, Valerius ; I never saw this place before, but the aspect of it recalls to me many fearful stories, and explains the meaning of many dark hints, that at the time when I heard them I could not understand. Here, without question, many a poor wretch has expiated his offences against the dignity of the shrine and the servants of Apollo. I have heard the priestess allude to this dreary place—I cannot bear to stay in it. Aurelius knows, I doubt not, some humble Christian roof beneath which we may be safe until the first search be over. Let us breathe at least the open air, and God, who has hitherto helped, will not desert us.”

“ There you speak rightly,” said Aurelius ; “ let us not linger here amid the scenes of darkness and blood. Christian roofs, indeed, are known to me both humble and

lofty, which would gladly shelter us ; but how are we to know how far suspicion may already have extended, or why should we run any needless risk of bringing others into peril, having, by God's grace, escaped ourselves from the most imminent peril, at the very moment when all hope, as to this life, had been utterly taken from us ? Let us quit these mysterious precincts—let us quit them speedily—but let us not rashly be seen in the busy city. There is a place known to me (and Athanasia also has, with far different purposes, visited it heretofore), where safety, I think, may be expected, and where, if danger do come, it can find no unnecessary victim. Let us hasten this night to the catacombs,* which are beyond the Esquiline. There, but a few nights ago, we committed to the dust the mortal relics of Thraso. I thought this evening to have approached the companionship of his better part. Beside the tomb of the blessed martyr we will offer up thanks for our deliverance, and await in patience the hour that is to make us altogether free—or to undo what has been done."

"Yes, dear father, let us go together," said the maiden ; "there is no one will seek us ; there, best of all, shall our thanksgivings and our prayers be offered. We will sit by the sepulchre of the holy man ; and Valerius will go into the city, and procure what things are needful."

She leaned upon me as she said so, and we began the descent of another flight of steps, beyond the dark chamber ; this terminated at length in a door, the bolts of which being withdrawn, we found ourselves beneath the open sky of night, at the extremity of one of the wooded walks that skirt the southern base of the Palatine—the remains of the more than Assyrian splendour of groves and gardens, which had once connected the golden house of Nero with the more modest structures of his predecessors. I wrapped Athanasia in my cloak, and walked beside her in my tunic ; and the old priest conducted us by many windings—avoiding, as far as was possible, all the glare of the Suburra—round about the edge of the city, towards the place of which he had spoken.

To my astonishment, it was not in any wild and desert place, but in the midst of the gardens which hang over the city wall, by the great Esquiline gate, that Aurelius at last desired us to slacken our pace, for that we had reached very nearly the end of our journey.

"Is it here," said I, "is it here, in the centre of all this splendour, that you hope to find a place of more safety than any private dwelling could afford you? The dead, indeed, are safe everywhere; but surely you have not chosen wisely such a retreat as this for the living!"

"Have patience," replied the old man; "you are but a stranger in Rome—and yet, after all, you speak what I should have heard without surprise from many who have spent all their days in it. For few ever think of entering a region which is almost as extensive as Rome itself, and none, I think, are acquainted with all the labyrinthine windings of that strange region."

So saying, the priest led the way into the centre of one of the thickest of the groves. The trees were tall and strong, and their branches formed a canopy overhead through which scarcely here and there the twinkling beams of a single star could penetrate. The undergrowth, however, was, if possible, still more luxuriant; insomuch, that not without great difficulty could we force for ourselves any passage among the close creeping shrubs and wide-spread bushes of alder. Perseverance, nevertheless, at length accomplished what seemed to me at first almost impracticable. We reached the centre of the wide thicket, and there, within the circuit of the woody screen, we found a small space of soil, comparatively bare. The light of moon and star plunged down there among the surrounding blackness of boughs and thick leaves as into some deep well, and showed the entrance of a natural grotto, which had, indeed, all the appearance of neglect, oblivion, and utter desertedness.

"Confess, Valerius," said the old man, "that I did not deceive you, when I promised a safe and a lonely shelter. But there is no hurry now; sit you down here by the mouth of the cavern, and let me taste once more the water of this hidden fountain, for my lips are parched and dry, and no one will disturb us."

I had not observed, until the old man said this, a small fountain hard-by the mouth of the grotto, which, in former days, had evidently been much cared for, although now almost all its surface was covered with water-lilies, and other tender flowers, that spread their leaves abroad over it. The marble, also, with which the sides of the fountain were coated, now showed dim and green, by reason of the undisturbed moisture, and the creeping moss; nor had a statue, that reposed just within the entrance of the grot, escaped the general desolation, for the damp grass had grown up so as half to cover the recumbent limbs, and the beautiful Parian stone had lost all its brightness.

"You can scarcely see where the inscription was," said Aurelius, "for the letters are filled up or effaced; but I remember when many admired it, and I think I can still repeat the lines—yes, it was thus they ran:—

'Nymph of the grot, these sacred springs I keep,
And to the murmur of these waters sleep;
Ah! spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave,
And drink in silence, or in silence lave.'*

Little did they who graved this command conjecture how well it was to be obeyed. But there should be another inscription here, and one of a very different tenour. Ay, here it is," said he, stepping on a long flat piece of marble, almost buried among the weeds, "here is it also; but it would be a more difficult matter for me to remember all the words that I have seen legible upon this fatal monument."

I was advancing to examine the stone, but the old man stopped me, and said, "No, no; what avails it to spell out the record of an old forgotten murder? Do you remember the story of Asinius? it is told somewhere by Cicero. It was within this very cavern that the man

* So Pope has rendered the beautiful lines of the celebrated inscription:—

Hujus Nympha Locis sacri custodia fontis,
Dormio, dum blandæ sentio murmur aquæ;
Parce meum, quisquis tangis cava marmora, somnum
Rumpere; sive bibas, sive lavers, tace.

was butchered ; and now, you see, both he and his monument are alike sinking into forgetfulness. I believe, however, the monument itself must bear the blame of part of this ; for I have heard my father say, that he had often been told this was one of the most favourite fountains about all this quarter until that slaughter took place, and then people became more shy of coming hither. It is all owing to that stone, that the precept of the Sleeping Nymph has been so well complied with.* But for that the underwood round about us would never have been permitted to thrive so wildly."

Athanasia, in the mean time, had sat down by the margin of the grotto, and was laving her forehead with the water of the solitary fountain. Old Aurelius, too, dipped his hands in the well and tasted of the water, and then turning to me he said, with a grave smile, "Valerius, methinks you are religious in your regard for the slumbers of the nymph." He whispered something into the ear of Athanasia, and received an answer from her in the same tone, ere he proceeded. "Draw near—fear not that I shall do any thing rashly—we owe all things to your love—we know we do ; but speak plainly,—Do you indeed desire to be admitted into the fellowship of the true Faith ? Let not the symbol of regeneration be applied hastily. Without doubt, great were my joy might my hands be honoured so as to shed the blessed water of baptism upon the brow of my dear Valerius."

"Ah, Valerius !" said Athanasia, "I know God has touched your heart ; why should this be delayed any longer ? You have shared the perils of the faithful. Partake with them in good, as well as in evil. Hesitate no longer ; God will perfect what has been so nobly begun."

"My father," said I, "and my dear Athanasia, dearer to me than all things, I hesitate only because I doubt if I am yet worthy. Surely I believe that this is the right faith, and that there is no God but the Jehovah whom you worship."

"Beautiful is humility in the sight of Heaven," said the

* *Asinius autem brevi illo tempore quasi in hortulos iret, in arenarias quasdam juxta portam Exquiliniam perductus, occiditur.—Pre Cluent.*

old man ; and with that he rose up from the place where he had been sitting, and began, standing by the margin of the well, to pour out words of thanksgiving and supplication, such as I have never heard equalled from any human lips but his. The deep calm voice of the holy man sounded both sweet and awful in the breathless air of midnight. The tall black trees stood all around, like a wall, cutting us off from the world, and from the thoughts of the world ; and the moon, steady overhead in the serene blue sky, seemed to shower down light and beauty upon nothing in all the wide world but that little guarded space of our seclusion. I stepped into the cool water of the fountain. The old man stooped over me, and sprinkled the drops upon my forehead, and the appointed words were repeated. Aurelius kissed my brow, as I came forth from the water, and Athanasia also drew slowly near, and then hastily she pressed my forehead with her trembling lips.

We all sat down together by the lonely well ; and we sat in silence, for I could not be without many thoughts, partaken by none but myself, at the moment when I had thus, in the face of God and man, abjured the faith of all my fathers, and passed into the communion of the feeble, and despised, and persecuted few ; nor did either the priest or Athanasia essay to disturb my meditations. There were moments (for I must not conceal from you my weakness) in which I could scarcely help suspecting that I had done something that was wrong. I thought of my far distant mother ; and I could not reflect without pain upon the feelings with which I had every reason to suppose she, kind as she was, and merciful in all things, would have contemplated the scene which had passed. I thought of my dead parent too ; but that was with thoughts yet more serious and awful. The conviction of my own mind, in obedience to which I had acted, relieved me, however, from any feelings of self-reproach—"My father is dead, said I to myself—He died in ignorance, and he has not been judged according to the light which never shone upon him. But now—oh yes, it must be so—the darkness has passed from before his eyes ; and if the spirits of the departed ever visit, in the dim hours of silence,

those who were dear to them upon the earth, surely his venerable shade stood by smiling while the forehead of his son was laved with these blessed waters." Nor were these all that I thought of. Meantime, minutes—hours glided away, while troubled, and solemn, and tender thoughts thus occupied by turns my bosom. The old priest sat by me, his arms folded on his breast, gazing upward upon the spangled glories of the firmament. Athanasia was on the other side, close by the statue of the sleeping Naiad. From time to time, she leaned her cheek upon my shoulder; then she, too, would fix her eyes for a moment upon the untroubled beauty of the moon; and then the maiden would turn away from me, stooping over the brink of the fountain, and once and again I saw its calm dark waters rippled beneath her by the dropping of a tear.

"My dear children," said the good old Aurelius, after this silence had lasted for I know not how long, "methinks more sadness is among us than might suit the remembrance of what Providence has done for us, since the sun that went down upon much sorrow is about to rise upon so many fair hopes. I am old, but you are young; the world lies behind me, save a remnant I know not how brief. It lays all before you, and you have a light whereby to look upon it which my early day wanted. I trust that soon, very soon, ye shall both be far from this city—I say both, for I know well, go where ye may, ye will both go together. As for me, my lot is cast here, and here I will remain. Valerius, you must leave us betimes—you must return into the city, and consult with your friends and hers, how best Athanasia may be conveyed safely beyond the bounds of Italy. Cesar, indeed, rules everywhere; but at a distance from Rome suspicion is, at least, less watchful; and there is no precept given by which ye are bound to seek unnecessary perils."

"Aurelius," said I, "my dear father Aurelius, think not but that I have already been considering all these things anxiously. As soon as I have seen you safely placed within the retreat of which you have spoken to me, I shall hasten to Licinius my kinsman, who already, indeed, must be feeling no small anxiety from my absence.

I shall speak with him, and with both the Sempronii. My own errand to the capital I value as nothing, and I shall be ready on the instant, if Athanasia herself will consent to partake my voyage."

"She will," answered the good priest: "in her hour of most imminent peril, she confessed that she loved you. Athanasia will be your wife, and ye will both serve the Lord many days, amid the quiet valleys of your far off island. Nay, Athanasia, my dear child, do not weep, for these are not common days, and you must follow without fear the path which God's providence points out for your safety. Before ye go, my children, I myself shall join your hands in the name of our God."

Athanasia heard his words, and saw me gaze upon his face, but she made no reply, except by the tears which Aurelius rebuked, and a timid yet grave and serious pressure, with which she, when he had made an end of speaking, returned the fervid pressure of my hand upon hers.

"Children," said the old man, "there is no need of words when hearts are open: the tears that ye have shed together are the best earnest of the vows that ye shall ere long, I trust, pronounce. Yet, let no rashness attend your steps. The dawn must now be near, and Athanasia and I had better retire into our protecting covert. Valerius will leave us, and return at eventide. Till then, fasting and praying, we shall give thanks for our deliverance, and ask the aid that alone is precious for the time that yet remains."

I had fortunately brought all the way with me the lamp which lighted our steps down the mysterious staircase from the shrine of Apollo. Some little oil still remained within it, and Aurelius soon struck a light, and taking it in his hand, began to enter before us the dark cavern, by the mouth of which we had all this while been sitting. You, perhaps, have never heard of those strange excavations, the whole extent of which has probably never been known to any one person, but which appear, indeed, even as the priest had asserted, to be almost co-extensive with the great city beneath whose foundations they are placed. For what purpose they were at first dug is a subject which has long exercised the conjectures of those fond of pene-

trating into the origin of things, and the customs of antiquity. By some it is supposed, that in such caverns, winding far away into unseen recesses, the first rude inhabitants of Italy, like the Troglodytes of Upper Egypt and Ethiopia, had fixed their miserable abodes. Others assert that they owe their origin merely to the elder builders of the visible Rome, who, to avoid marring the surface of the earth, were contented to bring their materials of sand, clay, and stone from these subterraneous labyrinths, which so grew with the progress of diligence, and with the extension of the city itself. Perhaps both conjectures may have some foundation in truth; but be that as it may, there is no question that, in later times, these great catacombs have been widened and extended, to serve as places of burial for the mortal remains of the poor citizens; and this more particularly since the period when the Esquiline Hill was given by Augustus to his favourite Mæcenas, and so purified from the pollutions to which allusion is frequent in the writings of Horace, and all the poets of the Republic. And now is it to be wondered at that here, in regions so obscure and dismal, the persecuted adherents of the new faith should have frequently sought, not only resting-places for the bodies of their dead, but even shelter for themselves, amid the darkness and cruelty of those relentless days? Hither, more than once, the old priest said, he had fled to escape the pursuit of his enemies—here once more he hoped the shield of safety would lie over his peril—here, at last, by whatever death he should die, his surviving brethren had promised to lay his bones in the earth, beside Thraso of Antioch, and many more that, in the bloody times of Nero and Domitian, had already, in the sight of all that heartless city, merited the crown, and the spotless robe, and the palm-branch of martyrdom, by patient endurance of the last insolence of man.

The old priest, therefore, held the lamp before us, and we entered those gloomy regions, wherein alone the servants of the Son of God could, at that troubled era, esteem themselves in safety from the hot pursuit of contemptuous power. We passed along beneath the dark arches of the rock-hewn roof, and between the long wind-

ing walls, on either side of which appeared many humble inscriptions; recording the virtues of the departed and the regrets of the surviving poor;—of these last, however, as it appeared, all must long since have been gathered to the ashes of those whom they had lamented, for there was no semblance of any new monument among all that we observed; and most of them, to judge from the shape of the letters upon them, must have been set up at least as long ago as the period of the death of Asinius. After traversing many of these long subterraneous galleries, we came at last to one narrower and more low-roofed than the rest, into which Aurelius struck aside, saying, "Here Thraso lies—but no inscription marks the place where a Christian finds repose—here is the spot; with my own hands I lent feeble help in digging the grave; Athanasia, too, knows it well, for she also did not fear to assist in rendering the last honours to that soldier of Christ."

A flat thin stone, without mark or epitaph, indicated the spot.

"Let us sit here," said Athanasia, "let us sit here patiently till Valerius returns; but how, when he is once gone from us, shall he ever be able to find us again among all the windings of this dark region?"

"He never could," said the priest, "neither he nor any one, I think; and therein is our safety. But that matters not; and yet, had I thought of it sooner, we might have spared him the trouble of entering our retreat along with us. The day, however, has not yet begun to dawn, and no time is lost; for at this hour he might excite suspicion by being seen walking in the streets. We shall conduct him back again to the gate of the cavern, and then wait here till the darkness of evening makes it safe for him to seek us out again. But, first of all, he must assist me in lifting up this stone."

I was a little surprised with this last proposition; but seeing that the old man was in earnest, I, nevertheless, complied with his request. The stone yielded to our efforts, and I saw, when it was removed, a sword, a spear, and a brazen buckler, lying together upon the surface of the recently stirred earth. I took the sword in my hand, and offered it to Aurelius; but he bid me lay that dower

for of such weapons he had no need. He then stooped himself, and lifted a small lamp of iron, which, with a cruise of oil, lay beside the weapons of the buried soldier. The lamp which we had brought with us could not have lasted much longer, so I was extremely relieved when I observed this new supply.

When I replaced the stone, however, I took care not to hide, for the present, the sword and the spear of Thraso. I laid them both at the feet of Athanasia ; and then leaving her by the funeral-stone, Aurelius and I retraced our steps to the mouth of the catacomb.

"Already," said he, as we came forth to the open air, "already the sky is red eastward—walk cautiously through the gardens, and regain with all speed the house of your kinsman. I need not preach diligence to you ; for you well know, that without your diligence, what has been done has all been done in vain. Go, my son ; may all blessings attend your steps. Come back at the rising of the moon, and cast a stone into the fountain, and I shall be within hearing. Go, and fear not."

CHAPTER XVI.

I PASSED without disturbance through the wide gardens of the Esquiline, and the streets of the city, in which no one was as yet moving, except a few rustics here and there, driving mules and asses laden with herbs to the market-place. When I reached the house of my kinsman, however, it was evident that sleep did not prevail within its gates ; for lights were visible in the vestibule, the gates of which, as could be by no means usual at such an hour, stood half-open to the way. I entered, and found Dromo, and several more of the domestic slaves, sitting in conversation with the porter ; while, apart from them, appeared Boto walking up and down, and visibly occupied with something quite different from what formed subject of their discourses.

He could not conceal the extravagance of his satisfaction on seeing me enter among them in safety ; so that I had no doubt his brother had informed him, in so far at least, of the strange scenes that had passed after our leaving him in the Mammertine at the beginning of the evening. Nor was Dromo the Cretan much behind him in many marks of satisfaction. The two affectionate slaves received me, in short, with the warmest demonstrations of joy, and conducted me together to the chamber of Licinius, in which I found a company assembled, the whole of whom, it was sufficiently manifest, had been waiting all the night in expectation of seeing or hearing from me. The orator himself was there—and young Sextus, pale with watching—and Sabinus, still habited in his full military attire, with a goblet of wine before him on the table—and, last of all, Lucius Sempronius, who was reclining in the corner of the room, at some little distance from the rest. It was he who eagerly and aloud began to question me the moment I came in ; and I knew from the style in which he spake, that all my friends who were present had already been made aware of the singular manner in which Athanasia and the old priest had been withdrawn from the council-chamber of the Palatine. A few words informed them of what had followed after we quitted the temple of Apollo, and of the obscure retreat in which I had just parted from the fugitives.

“ I thank the gods,” said Sempronius,—“ so far at least it goes well ; but if this strictness, of which the centurion speaks, shall be adhered to, there still must be no small difficulty about conveying the girl beyond the city.”

“ In truth,” quoth Sabinus, after a little pause, “ I am afraid this is scarcely a matter in regard to which I should be consulted. I know not but already I have done several things that could not be quite reconciled with my duty. I shall, in all probability, be set on the watch myself ; and if so—much as I must regret the necessity—it certainly will be most necessary for me to discharge what is committed to my trust. Is there no possibility, think you, of inventing some impenetrable disguise ? Depend on it, it is quite impossible the young lady should remain anywhere in Rome, without being ere long discovered. The first thing is to have her safe beyond the city-walls.’

"I myself," said I, "shall embark instantly for Britain. Sempronius, Athanasia must go with me: surely it may be possible to have her carried unobserved to the shore."

"You!" quoth Licinius—"you embark instantly for Britain! You know not what you say, my dear boy; your lawsuit has been determined this very afternoon, and you must not think of leaving Rome at the moment of such magnificent success. The great Valerian villa, and every thing that Cneius left, is your own."

"By Jove!" cried Sabinus, "did ever any mortal receive such a piece of news with such a face as this! But come, here is health to the lord of the great Valerian villa, and may this Massic choke me, if I don't love him the better for all his gravity."

"Would to heaven!" said Sempronius, "our young friend had loved as truly as he does under happier auspices! I am the last man in Rome who would wish to see him sacrificing the prospects that have but just opened themselves upon him. No, no, Valerius must stay and take possession of the palace of his ancestors, destined, as I hope he is, to equal, under the favour of the gods, the noblest name among all their line. My dear niece—let us trust she may be concealed somewhere in safety from the pursuit. Separated from this Aurelius, and the rest of this fanatic crew, she will ere long, without question, abandon the dreams they have filled her mind withal; and then, on some future happier day, our dear friend may perhaps have no reason either to fear or to blush for lifting her over the threshold of the Valerii. Their loves have been already well proved in trouble; let us hope that the merciful gods may yet reward them in prosperity."

I drew near to the old man when he had said this, and receiving his embrace, whispered into his ear, "Sempronius, you speak generously; but know that this very evening I also have become a Christian."

"Heavens!" cried he, "what limits shall ever be affixed to this contagion!—every day the madness seizes upon some noble victim. Rash, rash boy! have you not seen already to what consequences this must lead?"

"What is it? what is it?" says Licinius; "what new

calamity is this? Have my ears deceived me, or did I hear aright what afflicts me more than any thing of all that has yet happened? Speak, dear Caius, speak, and, for the sake of all the Roman blood that is in your veins, undo this suspicion! Swear that I heard not your whisper well! swear to me, that you have not embraced this phrensy!"

"My friends," said I, "why should I speak to one, when all of you are, I well know, alike interested in every thing that concerns me? Neither rashly, nor hastily, nor in phrensy, nor in any madness, but calmly and deliberately, after many struggles and much reflection, I have at length been satisfied that this faith, of which you think so contemptuously, is the only true faith; and that in it alone, now that it has been proclaimed to the world, the immortal hopes of mankind are reposed. Seek not to argue with me, for, ignorant as ye are as to this matter, it is impossible that you should speak wisely or well concerning it. In all things else I bow to the opinion of age and understanding so much above my own; but here I have thought for myself, and my faith is fixed."

Licinius looked upon me, while I spake so, with a countenance full of painful and anxious emotion. In the eye of young Sextus I saw a tear ready to start, and his whole aspect was that of one sad and bewildered. Sempronius leaned his brow upon his hand, and turned himself away from me. But as for the centurion, he preserved his usual air, without much alteration either in one way or another; and after a moment, all the rest continuing silent, he whispered to me across the table, "By Jove, Valerius, I have been in love myself ere now, and perhaps am not out of the scrape just at present; but, I must confess to you, you have thrown quite a new light upon the matter. Why, man, do but consider with yourself for a moment; how do you suppose the whole world has been going on for Heaven knows how many thousand years? What do you fancy to be the great merits of the present age, that it should be treated with more favour than all that have gone before it? And if you come to speak of the Jews—by Castor! I never was in their country, but everybody knows they are the most pitiful, black-hearted,

absurd, mean, knavish set of creatures that ever the world was disgraced with. They were always by the ears among themselves ; but I think it is rather too much that they should have the credit of bringing their betters (by which I mean all the world besides) into confusion. You may think as you please, but, depend upon it, I understand much more of their character than you do ; and rely upon me, my dear fellow, there is neither honour nor wisdom of any kind to be got by consorting with them. In fact, granting all the present disturbance were over, and these people allowed to follow their own devices without any one's interfering with them, I have my doubts whether your best friends could continue to keep company with you if you persisted in being one of them. I am sure nobody will be more sorry than I ; but really, to speak honestly, I think I am sure you will quite ruin your character if you don't instantly dismiss all this nonsense from your mind. And as for the young lady—I have seen many of them extremely superstitious (though not, to be sure, after this Christian fashion), and I never yet knew one of them who did not become wonderfully less so after she was fairly settled in life, and got a husband to be kind to her, look ye, children to be whipped, and a household to be scolded. Come, come, remember you are but green in the ways of the world yet ; and all this will blow over anon, and you will laugh more heartily than any one else when you think of your weakness ; but any folly is excusable after all in a young lover ; that is to say, man, provided it don't last too long. Come, come, a Christian, quotha ! By Jove ! I would almost as soon have suspected myself of this as you. But look up, my good friend ; I don't think you are listening to me."

"My dear Sabinus," said I, "I do listen, but I think it is rather to the gay Prætorian than to the patient friend I expected to have found in you."

"Poh ! poh !" said he, again ; "you take every thing so seriously. If you are resolved to be a Christian, I am very sorry for it ; but neither that, nor any thing of the sort, shall ever stand between me and a true friend. I hope you will soon see the thing as I do—I know you will ; but in the mean time, Valerius, you may count upon

me—I assure you, you may.” And in so saying, the kind man squeezed my hand with all his customary fervour.

He then turned round to the rest of our friends, who were still as silent as ever, and began, with the warmest zeal, to propose for their consideration a dozen different schemes of escape that had already suggested themselves to his imagination.

“One thing, however,” said he, “is, in the first place, absolutely indispensable; and that is, that we should have a bark in readiness at Ostium, or somewhere else; but there I think it would be least likely to attract any particular observation. We must have the ship quite ready,—manned, and victualled, and all; and she could set sail perhaps by night, and be off the coast before any one thinks of inquiring after her. And if you once get to Corsica, or Sicily, or any place beyond Italy, your way to Britain will lie quite smooth before you, and no one will think of offering the smallest interruption. But what do you think the young lady would be most likely to fancy during the voyage—I mean in the way of eating? We must take particular care as to that: you must on no account allow yourselves to be run so short as we were the last time. By Jove! the taste of that old biscuit is scarcely out of my mouth yet.”

Even Sempronius could not help smiling, when he perceived into what channel the thoughts of the provident centurion had turned themselves; and Licinius also smiled; but he soon recalled our attention to matters of more serious moment. He expressed himself, first of all, in terms of the deepest regret concerning the state into which my mind had been brought; but he had too much delicacy to hint—what, nevertheless, I have no doubt he would have done had I been absent—that he considered my love for Athanasia as having been the chief instrument of what he called my most unfortunate perversion. He passed then, at great length, into an account of the speech he had delivered on the preceding afternoon before the court of the Centemviri, of the arguments by which he had satisfied the judges as to the justice of my claims, of the applauses with which he had been listened to, and of the unhesitating manner, so gratifying to his feelings, in which the

favourable judgment of the court had been pronounced. For some moments, in his earnest detail of all these judicial proceedings, he seemed almost to have lost sight of the present situation and views of the person most interested in their termination. But then, when in the progress of his story he came to describe and enlarge upon the magnificence of my new possessions—the wide domains in Africa—the rich farms in Sicily—the thousands of slaves that were engaged in their cultivation—the Spanish silver mine—and, last of all, the splendours of the great villa upon the banks of Tiber, its gardens, its baths, its porticoes, its rich furniture, its paintings, its statues, its libraries, and I know not how many particulars besides—it was not difficult to perceive that he could scarcely think, without absolute indignation, of the person who, having but just become the master of all these things, could consent to abandon them for the sake of a pretty girl and a fantastic delusion. Had Sempronius not been there among his friends, I suspect he might have expressed himself rather more bitterly; but as it stood, it was quite impossible not to be aware of the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind. He concluded with saying, in a tone that bordered very nearly upon derision, “And such are the realities which our young friend quits for the reasons he has mentioned! Well, every man must judge for himself. If it must be so, let it be so.”

I heard him patiently to the end, and then said, “You have well summed up the whole matter, my dear Licinius. It must indeed be so, therefore let it be so: and if you love me, as how should I doubt you do, let it be without any further discussion of this kind, which I have already told you can be productive of no good effect: that is to say, of no effect which you, in your present state of opinion, could consider as good. I go immediately to Britain, and I trust she—for whom I would leave all these things, were they millions of times greater than they are—shall, by the aid of your kindness, go with me in safety. There is one request only which I have, in addition to all this, to lay before you; and that you may hear it the more patiently, it does not concern myself.

“In a word, then,” I continued, “should happier days

arrive, I hope once more to be among you here in Rome. The wealth which, thanks to your zeal, Licinius, is this day mine, can be of little use to me in the British valley to which, for the present, I retire. Above all, this beautiful villa of which you speak—why, because for a time I am unable to occupy it, should the mansion of my fathers stand empty, when there are others among their descendants who lie not under the same necessity of exile? Till I am enabled to breathe in freedom the air of Rome, I trust Licinius will consent to let Sextus represent me in my villa. There, too, I hope Sempronius will permit his daughter to be. It will give pleasure to Athanasia and myself to think, when we are far away in our solitary valley, that those magnificent halls contain the dearest of our friends. When we come back, if ever we do so, they will not grudge to make room for us beneath the same roof with themselves. Lucius—Sempronius, what say you?"

They were both silent for a moment; but Sabinus was at hand to answer for them.

"By all Olympus! I shall knock down any man henceforth who in my presence abuses Christianity as a destruction of men's hearts. Let it be, my good friends, as our dear Caius says. Let it be so. I know, Sextus, I have at least your voice upon my side. Let it be so; and for heaven's sake, let it be immediately. In my humble opinion, they ought to be married this very evening. It will go very hard if we can't contrive it so that Valerius and Athanasia may have a peep of the procession ere they embark. But I have been forgetting what I think is almost of equal importance. Our friends won't think of setting off without some ceremony of the same sort for themselves; will they?"

Our conversation was interrupted by Dromo, who told me that Silo the jailer had come to see me, and was below in the hall. There I found the humane man with his little daughter in his hand, and walked aside with him into the inner portico of the house. I told him how the escape, for which his zeal alone was to be thanked, had been terminated, and where Athanasia and Aurelius were waiting an opportunity of being conveyed beyond the city; and

then inquired whether no suspicion had been attached to himself in consequence of his absence from the Capitoline. He assured me that he had no reason to think any such suspicion had been excited ; but added, that after having been engaged in such an affair, he could by no means consider it proper for himself to continue any longer in the situation which he held.

“The oath which I had taken to Trajan,” said he, “prevented me from adopting the easier and simpler course of setting open for our dear friends the gates of the Mammertine ; and I trust that I did not offend against that oath by acting as I did, after they had been taken away for the time from my keeping. But both they and you must be alike aware of the pain which I suffered during their confinement, and of the dangers which I have encountered by giving my aid to their escape. I am resolved no more to be subject to such struggles. I cannot preserve my faith as a Christian and my honour as a servant of Trajan, liable, as you too well see I am, to be made an instrument in the hand of oppression for the persecution of those whose only crime is adherence to the same faith into which I myself have been baptized. This very day I resign my charge in the Mammertine ; this very night, if it so please you, I am ready to accompany you and my dear young lady, in your flight to Britain. There I shall, at least, be able to console the old age of my parents—there I shall sit by the same fireside with my brother—there I shall bring up my child in peace, and teach her young lips to repeat the name of her Saviour. Do not refuse my request, Valerius. I thirst for the repose of my native valley. I am weary of prisons and palaces, and blood and danger. I pray you, let me go with you—and lay my bones, when I die, beside the quiet waters of Anton, in which I bathed when I was a stripling.”

I need not say with what gladness I heard this proposal from Silo. Indeed, the thought immediately occurred to me, that, so far from being any impediment, he might be of the most essential use to us in forwarding our scheme of evasion. I left him, therefore, for a moment, and returning to my friends, informed them of what I had just heard, and of the hopes which I was inclined to entertain. The

whole of them, perceiving now at last, from the way in which I had spoken, that there was no chance of diverting me from my project, entered, like true friends, into serious consultation respecting the best method of carrying my project into execution. The aid of Silo, who had already given such proofs both of his presence of mind, and of his prudence, and of his courage, was regarded by them as affording promise of the highest importance. He was shortly summoned to take part in our consultation, and after much being said and considered, it was at last resolved that he, the jailer, after resigning in a formal manner the office he held, and transferring his property for the present into the custody of Licinius, should forthwith repair to Ostium, and there hire and put in readiness, for immediate use, a small vessel, the lightest he could find, in which the whole of the fugitive party might transport themselves at least as far as Corsica. To this proposal the zealous Silo without hesitation assented. It was agreed that he should have the mariners on their benches by the coming on of night, and that he himself should be waiting for us by a certain ruined tower, which stands conspicuously on a projecting rock by the river-side, about a mile and a half above Ostium. There he should be hailed by me, and from thence he should himself conduct us to the bark, which, the moment we reached it, should be put in motion to pass out from the harbour. We left it to Silo himself to stock the bark with any merchandise which he might deem best adapted to deceive both the mariners themselves and the superintendents of the haven.

All these things being so arranged, nothing more remained for me but to provide suitable disguises for Athanasia and the priest, and some plausible pretext, by means of which the vigilance of the nightly guardians of the city-gates might be overcome. I had still some difficulty to encounter before I could prevail on Sempronius and Licinius to give their consent for celebrating so hastily the nuptials of Sextus. But this also was in the end accomplished; and it was determined that the bride should be carried home, not to Licinius's house in the city, but to my villa on Tiber—where, after having passed the barriers,

Athanasia and I might hope to pause for some brief space, in our descent of the river—and so bid adieu, under circumstances of happier omen, to all the friends for whose sake either of us could be likely to regret our departure from Rome.

CHAPTER XVII.

I HAD been then but a few days in the capital of the world, and every hope of my bosom depended upon my succeeding in an attempt to quit its walls this evening; yet you do not imagine that my hours were spent in contemplation of the city, the magnificence of which, nevertheless, might be said to be still new and unfamiliar to my provincial eyes. The truth is, that, to say nothing of the interests which alone had power to occupy my secret mind, I had many engagements, in which, as I was at that moment situated, it was absolutely necessary I should consume a very considerable part of the day. Perhaps it might be well for me that it was so, for to return to the Esquiline before the fall of night was entirely out of the question; and had no external occupations been forced upon me, I should have done nothing, without doubt, but walk up and down the long porticoes of my kinsman's mansion, tormenting myself with unprofitable dreams, and perhaps disturbing for Sextus the happiness of a day, which it was the second wish of my heart he should never cease to regard as among the happiest of his life. I say, therefore, it was perhaps well, in every point of view, that, partly from the necessity of making provision of various kinds for my expected voyage, but still more in consequence of the lawsuit, with the termination of which you have just been made acquainted, I had no leisure that day, from which to work out unnecessary pain either for myself or for others.

First of all, I had to assist Licinius in looking over an infinity of deeds connected with the large possessions

my right to which had now been ascertained ; and to superintend the drawing out of others, by which I constituted him for the present my representative over all my Italian estates, and conveyed to his son the right of commanding, as might please him, every thing about my great villa in the neighbourhood of the city, and the numerous slaves, both rural and domestic, attached to its precincts. In the next place, I had to go to the Forum for the purpose of manumitting some slaves (such a largess being naturally expected on my accession) ; and while I was occupied with this, need I tell you that my own poor Briton was not forgotten ? Licinius having, at the joint request of Sextus and myself, accorded that morning to the Cretan also the well-merited gift of his liberty, Boto and Dromo were seen strutting about the Forum together for some moments, each of them arrayed in that worshipful cap which had for so many years formed, without doubt, the most prominent object in all their day-dreams of felicity. I shall not trouble you with needless particulars. Let it suffice, that the greater part of the day was thus spent by me in unavoidable business ; that towards supper-time I found the household of Licinius in mighty confusion, in consequence of the preparations for the approaching nuptials of young Sextus ; and that, chiefly to avoid occasioning any additional trouble at my kinsman's home, I once more accepted the invitation of the centurion, and became his guest at the Prætorian camp ; but not in the *Julius*, the noisy revels of which would have in nowise accorded with the spirits of one already fatigued as I was with much bodily watching, and still more grievously worn out by the pressure of mental anxieties.

I supped with the kind Prætorian, therefore, in his own private chamber, where, excepting only that he could not entirely refrain from touching now and then upon what he called my Jewish dream, his conversation was the kindest of all balsams that could have been applied to my feverish bosom. What he dwelt upon most fervently, however, was the probability—the certainty he seemed to esteem it—that a persecution of this nature could not be long persisted in by such a prince

as Trajan ; and the pleasure with which, that being all at an end, he should see me come back to Rome, and take due possession of the inheritance of my fathers. After expatiating most fluently for some minutes on the expected delights of that day, he paused suddenly, and then added, in a tone of some little hesitation, " And as for me, I wonder in what state you shall find me. Rich or poor—married or single—centurion or tribune—one thing is certain, that I shall, in all circumstances, be not a little rejoiced to see you."

" You had better marry, my good captain," said I.

" Marry ! me to marry ! I have not the least thought of such a thing. You did not put any faith, did you, in the raillery of those waggish fellows of yesterday ?"

" A little—a very little, Sabinus."

" Poh ! poh ! now you are jesting."

" And much, very much, Sabinus, in the conscious looks of a certain blushing centurion, yesterday."

" Come, come," quoth he, " there is more cunning in these British eyes of yours, after all, than I ever should have dreamed of. Fill your cup to the brim, boy ; and since you are to leave us so speedily, I shall e'en have no secrets for you:"

I did as I was bid, and nodded in signal that I was in readiness to listen.

" You smile," said he ; " by Jove, the boy laughs ! What would you have me do ? Look you, Valerius, I don't pretend to think I am much fallen from my prime yet. I have seen service ;—true, but what of that ? I have kept a light heart in all my campaigns, my boy, and I think I can still dance an old step, sing an old ditty, and drink a cup of old Falernian, when it suits my fancy, with the best of them. But my day, it must be confessed, begins to wear a little, a very little towards the evening ; and, Castor ! if you allow supper-time to slip over, I don't know but you must go to bed with a light stomach. Now or never was the word, my boy ; and the widow is mine own. I shall wed her in less than a month ; for I was resolved poor old Leberinus (my dear friend !)—I was determined he should have fair play at my hands—was resolved nothing should encroach upon his twelvemonth."

! "And Xerophrastes?" said I.

"And as for the most sagacious and venerable Xerophrastes, why, to tell you the truth, I see nothing for him but that he should allow his beard to curl as it pleases, drop his long cloak over his ambitious pair of shanks, forswear moonlight, purchase for himself a dark lantern instead, and see whether he can't find, within the four walls of Rome, an honest Greek, and a constant widow, to make one blessed wedding withal. That is my advice to the stoic—stoic no longer; but, if there be hoops upon a tub, the most cynical of all cynics. Methinks I already hear him snarling. Diogenes was but the Philip that went before this Alexander."

"Poor Xerophrastes!" said I; "I confess I, for my share, can scarcely help pitying him. The conceit of the moonlight scene was certainly quite too much; but, to speak honestly, did it not appear to you, at one time, as if the widow were very much disposed to listen?"

"My dear boy," quoth the centurion, "did you ever chance, having no profounder occupation, to spend a forenoon, saving your dignity, in looking over the parapet of a bridge?"

"Perhaps I may, Sabinus; but, if I did, I am sure I never saw either Xerophrastes or the pretty widow in the water, believe me."

"Well, I like that, I confess," quoth he again; "but tell me this, Valerius, did you ever see a pretty bunch of yellow straw, or a beautiful peacock's feather, or any other light gewgaw of terrestrial nature, wafted gently from beneath the arch, and about to plunge away into the more rapid course of the river? You nod; well, did you ever chance, being a bit of a philosopher after your fashion, as we all see you are, to take notice of a certain little, balancing, hesitating, charming indecision, which such a gewgaw takes a pleasure in exhibiting at such a moment? How the sweet toy will slumber for a minute on the smooth glassy surface of the water, immediately under the shadow of the bridge, as if not able at once to make up its mind into which of the three or four diverging streams, that all part just from about that point, it may be most becoming, or most prudent, or most

agreeable to commit itself? I have seen a blue and red feather keep half a dozen streams rippling away, like so many rivals, for as much time as would suffice to roast an oyster in the shell;—and, pray now, when the coquetry was at last over, and the pretty bauble had plunged into its fate, to which of the competing currents do you think it paid the best compliment?"

"You flow so fast, my dear Sabinus," said I, "that I can scarce follow the stream of your discourse. You 'rush so immense,' as Horace has it, that you lose not a little of your clearness. You are the most Pindaric of Prætorians."

"You are dull, Valerius—no offence to you—I mean you provincials are always a little dull; but, to level the whole matter to your comprehension, in case you had been so lucky as to be one of the half-dozen lovers among whom the beauty (I crave pardon, I mean the heiress of Leberinus) distributed the smiles of her widowhood—I ask you a very simple question—Whether would you have liked better to be one of those she had some thoughts of, or *the one* she did wed? I assure you, I am quite satisfied with the result of the affair; that is to say, provided she don't change her mind before the moon, that old type of widows, has trimmed her horns again, and set forth her broad smiling face, to light up once more the heavens that have so often witnessed her distress and her consolation."

"You talk of the moon," said I, "my dear Sabinus; I pray you look out and see how the evening wears. Think you not I might venture to walk towards the Esquiline?"

The centurion went out into the portico, and came back with the intelligence that there were clouds about the sky, but that he thought the moon could not fail to be up ere long.

"You shall go, therefore, my dear boy," said he, "you shall go forthwith to the Esquiline; and what is more, I will go with you."

"I will on no account suffer you," I replied; "what would Trajan say, if he ever came to discover it?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I believe Trajan would

say very little; that is, provided the storm were once blown over a little. I had some talk with himself last night, after that ingenious rescue of yours, and at first he spoke very bitterly; but when once he understood how the thing had been managed, he said there could be no doubt it was done by some of their Christian friends; and added, that, after all, the fellows, whoever they were, might have killed both himself and old Palma into the bargain, if they had had a mind. This idea seemed in some measure to soften him, and he told me something—I am sure you will stare when I repeat it to you—he told me that he had heard several stories very much to the credit of Athanasia, and among the rest, what think you he particularized, but the very story which you yourself told me you had heard from that goldsmith fellow in the barber's shop, the night we slept at my father's! Do you remember a certain swarthy man, who sat apart in the corner and asked questions about the Christians? I did not see him, but Virro spoke about him after I rejoined you."

"I do—I do; and I remember that he spoke in private some words to the goldsmith, and that the goldsmith looked very confused when the interview was at an end."

"No wonder—no wonder—the stranger, I will lay a year's pay on't, was no other than Trajan himself. And that story, and one or two things besides, had rendered him, I have a strong notion, extremely well disposed to deal lightly with Athanasia, could she have been prevailed upon to make but the least appearance of concession. And even now, I dare say, he is not in secret so very sorry about *her* escape; but that is little to the purpose, at least for the present. You know the prefect has set a price both upon her and the old man, and I promise you it is such a temptation as no virtue, that keeps watch beneath any common Prætorian breastplate, could well be trusted to wrestle withal. But let us hope the best. Let us hope that they have lain snug and unsuspected—as why should we doubt they have done? And here, do you once more take this helmet and cloak, and remember that the password of to-night is *Titus*—

for there is no saying but one or more of these things may prove of some little use to you. Take the sword with you too, man—and here I am ready to attend you myself. And look ye—you, lover as you are, would never once have thought of what is the most essential of all—here is a skinful of good wine, my boy. I promise you they must stand in much need of it, after spending a whole day, and a whole night to boot, in that murderous funereal region. I protest to you I never was there; but I take these catacombs, from your description of them, to be not much better than a second Tartarus.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THUS provided with all things that seemed to be necessary for our purpose, we were just about to quit the camp of the Prætorians, when a soldier of the guard presented to my friend a billet; which he had no sooner read than I saw plainly it contained some intelligence extremely disagreeable, if not alarming to him. He seized hastily his sword, and clasping his helmet upon his head, said, in a voice of much agitation, “Come, Valerius, we have been dallying here too long. I know not what troubles you may yet have to encounter.”

The tone of his voice, and the distraction of his gestures, inspired me with I know not what of obscure dread. I felt as if I could not muster courage to interrogate him as to what he had heard, but followed him silently with rapid steps, as he moved across the Prætorian court, and so onward by the city-wall towards the southern side of the Esquiline.

The streets of the city were all alive with the blaze of lights, and the sounds of merriment. Here crowds of idle people stood laughing around the stage of an Etrurian mountebank; there a fire was kindled by the wayside,

and dust-covered labourers were forgetting the toils of the day, as they sat around frying their fish among its embers; on one side was an old cripple, around whom knots of women and children were gathered, while he sung with a gay voice, leaning upon his crutch, the glories of some great day on which the Dacians were humbled and the Danube ran red with blood; on the other hand, drum and clarion invited all who could command three sesterces to witness the wonderful feats of the most sagacious elephant that had ever been disabled at the amphitheatre of Vespasian. Here sleek men were visible within booths of canvass, knocking down "slaves—strong slaves from the north," to the highest bidders; there a squeaking hag was giving out a full and particular account of the mule that foaled, and the calf that had been brought forth with the head of a serpent, and the three fiery meteors that had descended into the court of the Mamertine; and of all the other rueful signs and portents that had appeared at the moment when Cotilius, the Christian traitor, lost his head; also how the earth had yawned and swallowed up suddenly another hardened Christian, and a young enchantress that was his mistress, although he called her his daughter. All, in short, were busy, and most seemed to be light of heart; and no one regarded us, as we rushed along those crowded ways, on towards the dark pine-groves and deserted alleys of the Esquiline gardens.

We approached the clump of thick trees, in the centre of which the cavern is situated, and forced our way again through its entangled underwood. But now the space within was not illuminated as before by a brilliant moon, for, as I have already mentioned, the sky this evening was cloudy; there was light enough, nevertheless, to show, not only the poplar bushes that hung over the mouth of the grotto, but what I saw, alike with astonishment and alarm, two human figures, neither of them evidently such as I had expected to find in that region—one laid recumbent by the side of the fountain, the other pacing backward and forward, immediately in front of the entrance of the cavern.

At the first glance, as I have said, I perceived too

plainly that these were not the Christian priest and Athanasia; but who or what they were, it required more examination before I could form any conjecture. I stood with the centurion just within the edge of the woody screen, that on every side surrounded the open space,—and I stood for a moment in the breathless silence of consternation.

“Ha!” whispered he—“ha! Rubellia; too just has been your information. Perdition seize that infernal witch!”

“Pona!” said I; “alas! Sabinus, is that Pona who lies crouching there among the grass?”

“It is she—it is no other than she—and, confusion gape upon her cunning! there is a Prætorian soldier by her side. Alas, my dear Caius, what is to be done? Without question, a party is within searching the catacombs.”

“Ha!” I whispered, unsheathing my sword, “let us run, Sabinus—let us rush after them into the cavern.”

“Hush!” he replied; “put up your blade, rash boy. Do you forget who I am? Do you think it is for me to stand by and see you draw your sword upon the soldier of the prince?”

“Stand still, dear Sabinus,” said I; “stand where you are. Let me at least seek to bribe the soldier. You will not refuse to keep watch here, and prevent the witch from making her escape?”

“Valerius,” said he, “I am your friend, but I cannot be witness of any of these things; I will wait beyond the thicket. Heaven grant I see you soon.”

The centurion, so saying, retreated; and I waited where I was till he had gained the exterior of the thicket. I then returned my blade into the scabbard, leaped forth boldly, and immediately accosted the soldier. He took me, of course, for one of his own order, and answered me without hesitation.

“Have they found them?” said I; “have they not yet discovered them, comrade?”

“They have been gone for some minutes,” he replied, “but I have heard nothing. But as for you, I hope you won’t mean to claim any share in the reward? Come,

brother, fair play—fair play in all things. The chance is ours for this once. I pray you, walk away, like an honest fellow, and I promise you, for my part, as good a supper, and as jolly a skinful, as heart can desire.”

“I wish none of your reward,” said I; “but permit me to enter the cavern.”

“Do, at your peril,” quoth the witch, lifting herself suddenly from the ground—“give him entrance at your peril; and, first of all, look at his face, and see if ever you beheld it before beneath the shadow of a helmet.”

The man drew near to me, and gazing upon my countenance, said, very sourly, “By my faith! brother, I think the old woman is in the right. Pray, when did you first wear that garb, brother? Yes, and, by Jupiter, I think the headpiece should belong of right to nothing lower than a centurion. Of what band, an it please you, may you be captain?”

“Soldier,” said I, “there is no use in attempting to deceive you. I am neither soldier nor captain; but here is a purse of ten gold Neroes, which you may thrust under your girdle, if you will but give me permission to follow your comrades into that cavern.”

“Agreed,” quoth the soldier, dropping the point of his spear upon the ground, “agreed, my good friend; you speak as reasonably, I think, as any centurion among them all.”

I reached him the purse, and he, after balancing it in his hand for a moment, placed it underneath his cincture. I was then stepping forward to the mouth of the grotto; but the man instantly lifted up his spear, and, bursting into a loud laugh of scorn, said, “No, no, my good friend, that would be carrying the joke a little—just a very little too far. In the mean time, let it content you to sit down here quietly; for may Jove devote me, but I believe you will turn out to be not much less than a Christian yourself; in which case, good brother of mine, these are not all the pieces for which I shall have to thank you.”

“Thief, robber, traitor, base traitor!” I cried, and drew my sword. He stepped a pace backward, and stood in front of the fountain, his spear stretched forth towards me in his hand. “Foul robber,” I cried, “guard, or die!”

and before his thrust could reach my bosom, I had cloven asunder the shaft of his weapon, and the steel point fell at my feet among the grass, and my blade was close to his throat. He clapped his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and I struck.

He stumbled, and the well was immediately behind him, and he fell headlong backward. I leaped upon his breast—his helmet sunk beneath the water—I stamped upon his writhing breast;—strongly, fiercely, the dying caitiff struggled; but the struggle was brief. I stamped—I stamped with terrible strength—and the water ceased to ripple about my feet, for I stood but on a piece of clay. A dagger, at that moment, struck from behind upon me; but the armour was true, and I only staggered from the blow. Pona flung her poniard at me with the energy of a maniac, and darted from me—howling, shrieking, screaming curses—into the dark mouth of the cavern.

I rushed after her, my bloody sword in my hand,—I rushed as if on the wings of a tempest, into the dark cave that yawned before me—I rushed blindly, but I heard the footsteps of the flying witch, and I followed them like a bloodhound.

I gained apace upon the hag—the air brushed cool upon me, from the flapping of her garments. I touched—once and again I touched the skirts of her mantle. My hand grasped her throat—she screamed as if death had been in the touch. I arrested her flight, and relaxing for a moment my strong grasp, said to her, passing my wet blade at the same moment across her cheek, “One breath more, and you die. Lead me truly, and I give you your life—lead me truly, Pona, and I swear to you you shall live.”

The witch trembled in my gripe, and answering nothing, began in silence to move onward. The place was dark, dark as midnight, but she seemed, even in her mortal terror, to have possession of some instinct that made her tread as surely as if she had been walking under the open light of noonday. She walked on; she turned; she walked again forward. At last a ray of light gleamed upon me from the distant recesses of the gloom. “Tread gently,” I whispered, letting her feel again the bloody

weapon. She obeyed, and trod softly, yet swiftly, and more swiftly.

We reached the low-browed arch which leads to the sepulchre of Thraso. I looked ; a soldier stood with his back turned towards me, supporting himself upon his sword. On the ground before him lay old Aurelius, pale, fainting, propped upon his hand ; beside him stood Athanasia, erect, holding aloft in her hand a sword—the sword of dead Thraso—scarlet to the hilt ; her face deadly pale, but her eyes gleaming like the eyes of a young lioness guarding her young ; her long hair streaming wildly behind her from off her high marble brow.

I dashed the groaning witch upon the ground before me, and seized, at the same moment, from behind, the arm with which the Prætorian was leaning upon his weapon. The man resisted not, but dropped feebly upon his knees, his support being thus hastily withdrawn. Athanasia lifted her sword yet higher over her head, and said, "More ! yet more !" and then looking again, she recognised me on the instant, and dropping her bloody blade upon the ground, she rushed into my embrace.

"O Athanasia !" said I, "what have you done ? What an hour is this !"

"God will judge me !" she replied ; "surely he only strengthened me when I saw Aurelius struck to the ground by the blow of the soldier. O Valerius, I am faint to death ! Oh ! let us leave this dark place, if yet there be any hope before us. Let us leave this place of blood and darkness."

"Go, go, my children," said Aurelius, lifting himself half-up from the tombstone on which he was lying ; "go, go, my dear children, and the Lord lighten your steps !"

"My father, my dear father !" said the maiden ; "oh ! I fear your wound is deep ; let us bear you to the open air. Valerius, haste ; haste, Caius, let us lift him to the fountain, for, both with long fasting and this sad blow, our father is faint."

"No, no," said the old man, "it is all in vain, it is all over ; leave me, leave me here with Thraso—here will I lie best. But now I thirsted for the sweet air of heaven ;

and now—I thirst no more ! I am feeble, feeble, my children : the old blood flows slowly, but the wound is deep. You said well the wound is deep ; blessed be the name of the Lord !” The old man, with these words, sunk down again quite prostrate.

“Lift him, lift him, Caius ; let us lift him together,” said Athanasia. I did lift the pale old man, and he regarded me while I was doing so with a dim unconscious eye. Athanasia took the lamp, and leaving the wounded soldier and the witch together, we essayed, with what speed we could muster, to gain once more the entrance of the grotto. The marks of my feet, wet from the fountain, conducted us better than we could have had any reason to expect ; and at length the penetrating breath of the night air indicated that we drew near to the object of our desire.

Athanasia started, and uttered a scream of terror, when she beheld over-against the mouth of the grotto another person in the military garb, standing distinct in the moonlight ; and I also started. “But fear not,” said I, looking steadfastly ; “now you have no cause to fear ; ’tis my friend, the kind centurion Sabinus.”

The anxious centurion met us, as we came forth, with a most troubled air, but asked not one question concerning what had passed in his absence. Perceiving only that, by whatever means, we had escaped from the dangers of the cavern, he hesitated not to offer every assistance in his power for the completion of our projected scheme ; but Athanasia thought of nothing at that moment but the wounded priest.

We laid him gently down upon the long grass, by the margin of the fountain, and Sabinus poured wine into his mouth, and water upon his face ; and after a moment the old man revived, and opened his eyes in such a manner that we all began to entertain some hope his wound might not prove fatal.

It was, however, but for a moment ; it was but the gleam in the socket—the last faint flutter of the expiring flame. Yet who can tell how much may be compressed into the farewell moments of life ? Oh, who can tell how much of fear may be mingled with how much of

hope in the brief shallow draught of the unresisted cup? In dreams, years seem at times to pass on the wings of a moment. Who shall tell whether, when the body hangs already loose upon the parting soul, the same energy may not be exerted for sorrow, for joy, for memory, for foresight?

The old man propped himself upon his left hand, and Athanasia, leaning close to him, supported his hoary head upon her bosom. "Look up," said she, "my dear father! my dear Aurelius, look up once more, and bless your children!"

"My children!" said the old man, gazing round with his dim eye from side to side—"my children! where are you, my boys? Aulus! Titus! Marcus! my dear gallant boys, where are you? Come close to my bedside, brave lads; let me feel your hands—touch me—touch me. Kiss me, my dear children, ere I go." He gazed a moment, and stretched forth his hand over the fountain. "Not one of you here, my children? not one?—no, not one! Quite alone. Why do you leave me thus to die quite alone? Jupiter—Jupiter, father of gods and men, what seest thou here? Is it seemly that an old man should be thus utterly deserted?" He paused again for some space, and then dropping his head, said, in a feeble whisper,—“Foolish, foolish old man, dost thou call upon the dead? Can the dead hear thee? They will hear and see thee both ere long.”

"My dear Aurelius," said Athanasia, "dream not so—look upon *us*, on *us*; we also are your children. God has made you our father; we love you as our father."

"God! ha!—what God?" said the old man; "what God do you speak of? I charge you not to speak to me of Jupiter; Jupiter is but a vision. Would you go worship stocks and stones, children, that ye have seen hewn by the hands of sinful men like yourselves? Will you fall down to the altar of a demon? Speak, children—I charge you renounce Jupiter. Jupiter, ay, Jupiter, with his thunderbolt, and Apollo too, and Mars, bloody Mars; they are all dreams—visions. What have I to do with your dreams?"

"We do, we do renounce them," said Athanasia:

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"your own hands have baptized us in the name of the Saviour. We are all Christians, dear father; we have no hope but in this faith."

"Faith! children—what is faith?" said the dying man; "I beseech you to tell me what is faith? Dark! dark. Oh, children, every thing is dark: to-day we crawl; to-morrow we die. Tell me, children, do you see any light before me? Poh! poh! 'tis but the moon. What is darkness? We know but the day and the night, and there may be other eyes than ours. My children!—I am faint—very faint; and yet all is dark—Alas! oh God! why thus utterly am I deserted?"

The old man dropped back heavily in the arms of Athanasia, and we hung over him for a moment, not doubting that the spirit had at length been released from its bondage. "He is dead!" said Sabinus; "he is dead utterly—why linger you here? let us fly—let us fly!" The old man opened his eyes, however, yet once again; and lifting himself up, displayed a countenance so calmly, so beautifully radiant, that he needed not to open his lips in order to satisfy us that peace, and hope, and faith had at last been vouchsafed to his bosom. "My dear children," said he, "the cloud hath passed away—I see—I see the brightness. My God deserts me not; my children, let me bless you ere I die—Where are your hands, my children? Give me your hand, Valerius; and yours—give me yours also, my sweet daughter—I place them together—Let no man part them;—whom God hath joined let not man put asunder. The blessing of God rest on you, my children—Close my old eyes ere you go—ere you go—"

He said so, and, with a gentle sigh, he breathed out his life in our arms. We closed the lids upon his eyes. We wrapped him all decently in his mantle; and Sabinus said nothing to restrain us, when we said we could not depart from the place without having laid the mortal relics of our friend in the tomb which he had prayed for in our hearing. Athanasia once again held the lamp, and I followed her, bearing the body in my arms, our feet guided by darker drops than had been aiding to us before, for all the way to the sepulchre of Thraso the ground was spotted with the blood of Aurelius.

The wounded soldier was lying in the grasp of death, and over-against him sat the enchantress Pona, singing to herself one of her old charmed songs, which she interrupted not even when we reached the place where she was sitting. We lifted the flat stone from off the grave of the martyr, and throwing up the loose sand with my sword, I committed the corpse of the holy man to the embrace of earth. I replaced the stone, and led away the weeping Athanasia.

We retraced once more our steps, hearing, for a long while after we had left the sepulchre, the song of the hideous witch singing alone amid the darkness. Once again we breathed the air of heaven ; I dipped my hands into the fountain, lest Sabinus should observe unnecessarily the bloody stains ; I returned my sword into its scabbard, and prepared to obey at length the earnest entreaties of the centurion.

As we came forth from the thicket, within whose circuit all these things had occurred, we heard the neighing of a horse, and I was at first inclined to hasten the more the steps of our flight. But Sabinus insisted on our waiting for a moment, and walked aside towards the point from which the sound proceeded. When he came back, he was leading in his hand two horses fully caparisoned ; "We must not stand upon trifles," said he ; "we must make free to mount." I placed Athanasia on one of them, and vaulted on behind her. Sabinus mounted the other, and dashing into a rapid pace, we soon drew near, without having met with any interruption, to the Ostian Gate ; for by that, the centurion said, we should most easily strike into the right path to the Valerian villa, where all our friends were expecting us.

The soldiers who were on guard at the gate challenged us cheerily as we came up to them.

"The word, comrades?"

"*Titus!*" quoth the centurion.

"Pass on—whom bear you with you, comrades?"

"A Christian—a Christian prisoner," said I.

"By Jove, that's worth gold to you, brother," quoth the guard.—"Open the gate there ;—pass on, friends,—and may a curse go with your burden,—I hope I shall have luck one day myself."

The Ostian Gate closed behind us, and we proceeded at a fiery pace westward, till all the light of the suburbs was left in our rear.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE rode in silence thus swiftly till we had advanced, it may be, four or five miles on the road towards Ostium.

It was then that, on gaining the brow of an eminence more considerable than any we had yet come to, we halted for a moment, as if instinctively. On looking backward we could still discover, by the now clear and perfect moonlight, the mighty masses of the Eternal City rising black against the horizon, high above all the intervening expanse of gardens and groves. I paused, to regard for the last time the gigantic outline, and heard, borne soft and sweet through the serene air, the far off melancholy voice of the horn, announcing to the Prætorians the changing of the watch. The martial music of the villages around responded in succession to the note sounded from the Capitol. And then again all was silence, save the night-breeze sighing among the poplars with which our path was skirted.

"Farewell to Rome!" whispered Athanasia; "my heart tells me, Caius, that we have had our last look of the city."

I pressed the maiden to my bosom, and we continued our course down the hill, and were soon buried among the darkness of my paternal woods.

"Perhaps you are not aware," said the centurion, who by this time had quite recovered himself, "that we are now riding through your own domain. Many a time, Valerius, have I hunted for birds' nests, when I was a boy, among these fine oak woods; little did I think then that I should ever visit their shades under such circumstances as these. But, upon my word, there

seems to be a great deal of very valuable timber here : I think you ought to give orders about thinning the clumps, and they would have plenty of time to grow again before your return."

"Indeed I think they would," said I ; "but, in the mean time, I shall spare them—I would not have the old groves lament over my succession."

"What a British notion !" quoth Sabinus ; "by Jove, I think you have still some tincture of your maternal druidism about you ; but stop—Ha ! yonder is really a sight of splendour !"

He pointed through an opening among the thick trees on the right-hand, and we perceived, indeed, at some distance below us by the river-side, innumerable symptoms of magnificent festivity. The great arcades of the villa were blazing from end to end with lamps and torches, displaying in distinctness that almost rivalled that of noonday every gilded cupola and sculptured porch, and all the long lines of marble columns that sustained the proud fabric of the Valerian mansion.

In front of the main portico, and all along the broad steps of its ascent, stood crowds of people, as if in expectation. Before them, girls and boys, all clad in white raiment, were dancing on the lawn to the sound of a joyful labour. A confused hum of gladness ascended from every part of the illuminated pile. "Come, my boy, push on cheerily," quoth the centurion ; "if you don't, you may chance after all to be too late for the great moment. The procession, it is evident, can be but a little way before us—and I, Valerius," he added in a whisper, "must not lose the benefit of the rehearsal."

At the gateway, which opened a little farther on into the gardens, we found the two faithful freedmen Boto and Dromo, waiting for us with horses richly caparisoned (for they knew not how we might travel from the city), and with change of dress for the whole of us. We passed under the porch of a small rural chapel that stood near the gate, and there Sabinus and I exchanged our military attire for the peaceful gown, (in which alone we could with propriety appear in the nuptial

celebration. Athanasia, for her part, threw over all her dress a long veil of white, for she alone durst not show her face in the precincts, where of right she was mistress. We then mounted the new steeds that had been prepared for us, and dashing through the grove that edged the lawn, joined the bridal procession just at the moment when it had come in front of the villa—and all the merry clamour of shouting, and all the bursting melody of lutes and cymbals, saluted the first appearance of the curtained litter in which the young Sempronius was borne in the midst of her attendant pomp of horsemen and chariots.

Conspicuous in front of all rode, in his lofty car, the Flamen of Jupiter, arrayed in his long purple robe, and wearing on his head the consecrated diadem. The priestess of Apollo, too, was there, surrounded with all her damsels, ruling, or seeming to rule, with her own hand, the milk-white horses of the sun that pawed the ground before her burnished wheels. Gay horsemen checked their steeds amid the blaze of torches and the peals of music. White-robed damsels and youths, advancing from the portal, chanted the Hymenean. Far and wide, nuts and rose-buds were scattered among the torch-bearing throng. Young Sextus leaped from his horse, and the litter touched the ground; and the bride, wrapped all over in her saffron-coloured veil, was lifted, gently struggling, over the anointed threshold. Sabinus swelled the hymeneal chorus with his ever-cheerful voice; while poor Athanasia—my own unsaluted bride—she stood apart from all the clamour, gazing through her veil—it may be through her tears—upon the festal pageant.

We ventured not into the blazing hall till all the rest had entered it. The symbolic fleece had already been shorn from the spotless lamb, and all were preparing to pass into the chambers beyond, where the tables appeared already covered with the wedding-feast. Every one was glad, and every one was busy; and no one regarded us as we stood beneath the pillars of the hall, contemplating the venerable images of my ancestors, that were arranged all around us—from the mouldered bust

of the great Publicola, down to the last of the lineage, the princely Cneius, whose inheritance was and was not mine. There were moments, I cannot conceal it, in which some feelings of regret were mingled with the admiration, which I could not refuse to the spectacle of all the ancient grandeur that for the first, and for the last time, I was gazing on. But Athanasia leaned upon me as I stood there, and all things seemed well, when I felt the pressure of her bosom.

Ere long, Dromo approached us, and led us aside from the scene of all the noisy merriment into an upper chamber, where, divested of her veil, the lovely bride of Sextus stood waiting to fold Athanasia in one parting embrace to her bosom. I turned aside, and witnessed not their farewell tears.

Licinius, Lucius, Velius, and the priestess came into the bridal-chamber, with the wreathed cup. It was then that, in their presence, I proclaimed Athanasia for my bride. They kissed her pale cheek—once and again she returned the salute—and with slow steps we took our departure. Sabinus, the good Sabinus, walked along with us down the dark alley that led to the river-side. The two freedmen were already sitting at their oars—we bade adieu to the centurion—tenderly the kind man bade us both adieu—and I lifted my Athanasia, weeping natural tears, devoid of bitterness, into the little boat which had been prepared for us.

Boto began, as we pushed off from the shore, to chant an old British boat-song of his, which I had heard a thousand times without thinking any thing about it, but which now, I know not how, seemed to me to breathe the very spirit of pensiveness and repose. Athanasia, wrapped in her long cloak, leaned herself like a bride upon my bosom, and I looked back upon the illuminated mansion, and thought almost that there was something of distastefulness in the mirthful strains that still echoed from its dome. Slowly the measured oars divided the dark waters; and gladder hearts have been floated upon the calm breast of Tiber—but none calmer, none happier than ours.

"Dear Boto," said I, "methinks that is a fine old song

of yours; yet you know that I have brought a bride with me to-night, and surely you choose a very melancholy strain."

"My dear master," he replied, "I thought not my dear lady would take any notice of my song; but 'tis one that the Salurian boatmen sing whenever they are on the water at the midnight. It was made, they say, by one of their old chiefs, as they rowed him away one night over the sea to Mona, after all his kindred had been slain, and his village burned in the woods by the Romans; and it seemed to me, my dear master, that we, too, were now rowing away from them, for they are as cruel now as they were in the old time. Pardon me for what I say, but you were always with us, my dear master, from your childhood; and your mother is one of our own race, and I cannot help thinking of you as one of ourselves."

"My dear Boto," said I, "sing on, if it please you, and I will tell your lady what I can of the meaning of your song."

He obeyed, and resumed his mournful strain—the same which, I dare say, you have heard him sing when he was old.

"The night is dark above the water,
The hills are all behind us far;
We cannot see the hill of slaughter,
Where in their tents the steel-clad Romans are."

Row gently through the gentle sea—
Row gently, for my wound is deep—
Soon, soon in safety shall ye be—
And I, too, brothers,—for I fain would sleep.

Our own old oaks stand scathed by fires,
Around the roofs for which we bled;
The bones of our unconquered sires
Stir in their cairns—for sorrow moves the dead.

Row gently, for my wound is deep,
And sadness fills my weary eyes—
Row gently, for I fain would sleep—
I fain would sleep, and never more arise."

So glided we down the deep calm stream of Tiber.

At the place upon which we had fixed in the morning we were hailed from the shore by Silo, and, having taken him in, received the welcome intelligence that he had secured for our use a very light and convenient bark, the master of which had intended sailing in the course of the day that was just over for New Carthage, but had willingly delayed for a few hours, in order that he might not lose the gain of carrying us along with him. "From that part of Spain," said Silo, "there can be no difficulty in procuring some vessel bound for our native island. My little daughter is already on board, under the keeping of the master. All at Ostium is sleep and silence, and the tide flows fair over the sand; so we shall be, ere day-break, far out upon our course."

We found the vessel, such as he had described her, lying somewhat apart from the multitude of galleys that throng at all periods the great seaport of the capital. The zealous Dromo, not without much emotion, there parted from us, and, laden with gifts, not of form, but of thankfulness, began to row himself alone up the river, back to the villa, at which I understood his habitation was now to be fixed.

"Farewell, my kind master," he said, as he was about to push off his shallop from under the side of the vessel; "farewell, my kind Master Valerius, may all the gods, wherever and whatever they be, grant you smooth water and fair wind; and may both you and my fair lady—not forgetting my good friend Boto, whose education I can scarcely be said to have begun—soon, very soon come back to us, in times when ye shall have no need to look upon your own house lighted up for the feasts of others, nor to be rowed away down Tiber by midnight, and carried back to that island, which, for all that you say of it, is, I suspect, a cold miserable place, saving your presence, in comparison of my native Crete. Farewell! sweet winds blow upon you. Have you no last message for any of your friends that you are leaving behind you?"

"Give my love to them all," I replied,—“your master Sextus—”

"My patron Sextus?" quoth the new freedman, correcting me.

"Your pardon, Dromo—your patron Sextus, and your old patron his father, and your young lady, for I am sure you will allow me to call her so; and last of all, the next time you see him, to your good friend and mine the centurion."

"I will, I will," quoth the Cretan; "and since you have said it, sir, I believe he has as much reason to think me his friend as any man in Rome, slave though I was, and poor freedman as I am ever like to be. I will tell you when we meet next some pretty stories; and long, long before that day comes, Sabinus, let me tell you, will be lord, as he well deserves to be, of one of the prettiest ladies, and one of the prettiest houses, too, that can be found this night within the four walls of the city you have quitted. But I dare say he told you all—did he tell you before you parted about his wedding? Heaven bless me! first and last, what a job that pretty widow has been to me! But no matter, 'tis all well now—Sextus has in his arms all that he desired to have; and Sabinus, I think, is at least good enough for the lady he is to have in a day or two. Although, after all, to speak truth, I don't know why she should be ill-spoken of for any thing that has passed. She followed her fancy, and who can blame her for doing so? But as for Xerophrastes, I confess I am glad Master Longbeard has taken to the Tub at last. Oh! how it will tickle my bones to stand by when I fall in with him, and hear him declaiming after his new fashion. I shall buy a bunch of green grapes that day, were I to pay their weight in brass for them, just that I may have the pleasure of sticking them up on the wall, right before the face of the old fox."

"Good-by, Dromo; you are still the same man, I perceive. Good-by—commend me to all—and commend me, in all reverence, to Xerophrastes, too, when you encounter him."

"Good-by, once more, master," cried the gay Cretan, and pushed off with all his vigour. We loosed our

hawsers a moment after, and stretched our sails before a breeze as favourable as he had been wishing us.

An awning had been erected on the stern by the providence of the jailer. Thither Athanasia and I now retired, while the mariners plied their strength, and Silo and Boto went to sleep upon the deck. But gladly did we hail the open sea, when our bark emerged upon its surface; gladly did we peep forth to see the clear deep shining below us like a second dark blue firmament, so truly was it giving back the reflection of the innumerable stars that shone in the serene sky overhead. The bark skimmed the calm surface of the waters like a sea-bird. The sailors whistled joyously to the prospering gale.

The sun was riding high in the heavens when we looked forth on the morrow; air and sea were sleeping all around beneath the fervid glow of the day-star, and far, far eastward, the blue shores of Italy lay behind us like the shadows of a dream.

APPENDIX.

[Although the two following Letters are well known both to classical scholars and to the readers of works on Church History, yet it has been thought that they might be added in this place without impropriety. The preceding pages may happen to be perused by persons who have never seen any of the collections in which these letters are to be found ; and they afford by far the best and most authentic illustration, both of the manner in which the subject of Christianity was regarded by the polite Romans of the day of Trajan, and of the principles upon which that prince regulated his conduct in regard to the adherents to the new faith.]

PLINY TO TRAJAN.*

IT is a rule, sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts ; for who is more capable of removing my scruple, or informing my ignorance ? Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted, not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the ages of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult ; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon, or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error ; whether the very profession of Chris-

* Book X. Letter 97.

tianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession, are punishable ; in all these points I am greatly doubtful. In the mean while, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this : —I interrogated them whether they were Christians—if they confessed, I repeated the question twice, adding threats at the same time ; and if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished : for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same insatiation ; but, being citizens of Rome, I directed that they should be carried thither. But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An information was presented to me, without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several persons ; these, upon examination, denied they were, or ever had been, Christians. They repeated, after me, an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites, with wine and frankincense, before your statue (which, for that purpose, I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ ; whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances. I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some, among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it ; the rest owned, indeed, they had been of that number formerly, but had now (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) renounced that error. They all worshipped your statue, and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery ; never to falsify their word,

nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. After which, it was their custom to separate, and then re-assemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. In consequence of this their declaration, I judged it the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious functions ; but all I could discover was, that these people were actuated by an absurd and excessive superstition. I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration ; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented ; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived ; to which I must add, there is again also a general demand for the victims, which for some time past had met with but few purchasers. From the circumstances I have mentioned, it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed, if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error.

TRAJAN TO PLINY.*

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in the proceedings against those Christians which were brought before you, is extremely proper ; as it is not possible to lay down any fixed rule by which to act in all cases of this nature. But I would not have you *officiously* enter into

* Book X. Letter 96.

any inquiries concerning them. If, indeed, they should be brought before you, and the crime should be proved, they must be punished ; with this restriction, however, that where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our gods, let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed ought not to be received in prosecutions of any sort ; as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the equity of my government.

THE END.



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